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THE
SON OF ETHELWOLF:

AN

Historical Tale.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ALAN FITZ-OSBORNE, &c.

"There is no spectacle more grateful to the Gods, than that of a virtuous Man struggling with Adversity."

SENECA.

VOL. I.

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TO

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

*GEORGE*

PRINCE OF WALES.

SIR,

WHILE my gratitude is excited  
by the distinction which your  
Royal Highness has been pleased to  
confer upon me in permitting this  
address, my vanity is also encouraged  
to hope, that, at a vacant moment,  
the following pages may be honoured

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by

by your perusal. Yet, in truth, I ought not to say vanity, since in entertaining such a hope, I depend more on the genuine merits of their hero, than on any embellishments I have attempted to give him, which perhaps may only tarnish the lustre they were meant to raise.

History, in describing the manners of ages past, is the monitor of those which follow: it has testified the virtues of the Son of Ethelwolf, and a grateful people will acknowledge that the best patron of his fame, is a prince; who in the prime of youth, of power, and of prosperity, undazzled by the splendor that played around him

him, evinced his attachment to those moral duties which bind man to man, by the first and most affecting exertion of disinterested greatness !

Heaven has restored to you a father, to England a sovereign, worthy of the tears that were recently shed for him, and of the happiness that his recovery now inspires.— Yet even in those sad moments of distress, caused by the apprehension of a calamity, which Providence has graciously averted, a bright ray of consolation dissipated in some measure the surrounding gloom. All truly loyal hearts felt, that the prerogatives of majesty, the liberties of England, had still a vi-

gilant guardian, who already had approved himself worthy of the important trust.—HE, who despising the advantages of royalty, when they clashed with the rights of justice, nobly divested himself of them, and gave in his own conduct the most sacred, and most energetic lesson, of submission to the laws.

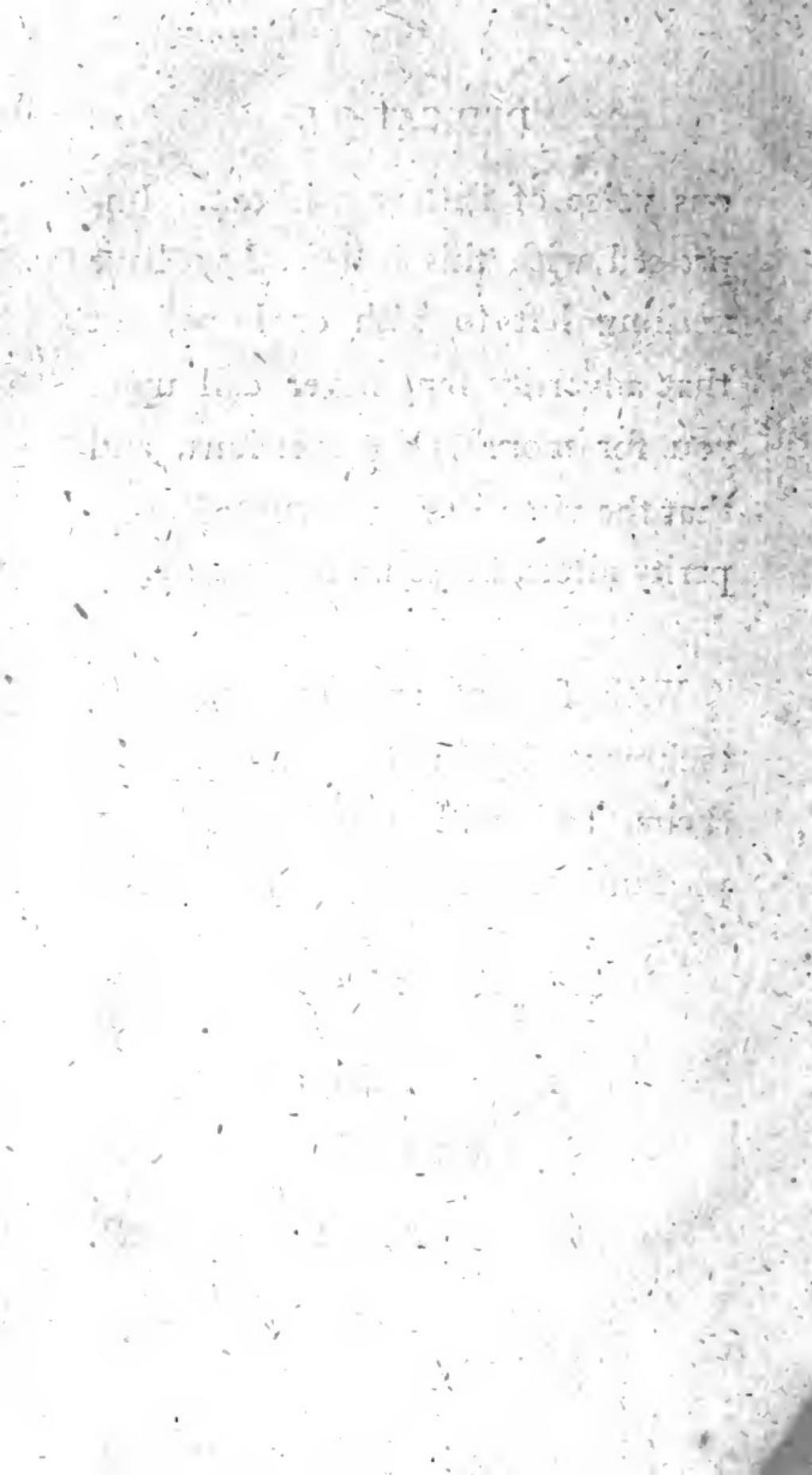
That action was a promise of future good. As such, a freeborn people accept it.—They know that man is liable to error, and that princes above all men, are most exposed to its delusions.—But they trust, that the monitor within your Royal Highness's breast, will still counteract the insidious

ous voice of flattery without. Impressed with this belief, they have nothing left to wish or hope, but that adversity may never call upon you for more trying exertions, and that the virtues of uncorrupted prosperity alone, be yours to practise.

With fervent and unfeigned attachment, I join my feeble voice to theirs, and with equal pride and pleasure, subscribe myself,

Your Royal Highness's  
most faithful, and  
most obedient servant,

ANNE FULLER.



THE  
*SON OF ETHELWOLF*  
AN HISTORICAL TALE

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HARSH and loud blew the stormy wind; the rain descended in torrents; and the clattering hail beat hard on the roof of the peasant Dunwolf.— He drew near to the cheery hearth: the thunder rolled over his head, while gleams of blue lightning shot through the lattice work of the casement. The aged peasant shuddered.

“ O, thou,” cried he, bending his knee, “ who fillest the heavens and the earth with the terrors of thy power, have pity on the unhappy wretches who abide the horrors of this night !”

"*We* are safe, Dunwolf," said Winefreda, with a look of satisfaction, while she applied new fuel to the blazing hearth. The old man arose. "True," replied he, frowning, "*we* are safe, but where is Edbald? I tell thee, dame, he is deserving of thy most anxious care." "He is a thriftless servant," said Winefreda. The answer disturbed Dunwolf. "Dame," said he, after a short pause, "perhaps we should be his servants."

At that moment the voice of Edbald claiming admittance at the door, prevented the old man from proceeding. He hastily opened it, and his domestic entered. While he was busied in administering comfort to him, and Winefreda with loud clamours reproving his neglect of the herd committed to his charge, Edbald, unmindful of both, continued motionless and silent.

"Heed not the asperity of my dame," said Dunwolf, in a soothing voice, "poverty

verty and age have soured her." Edbald answered not: his eyes, now raised to heaven, and now declined to the earth, proved that the disturbance of his mind arose from no common cause.

Winefreada renewed her clamours. The old man checked and silenced her. Edbald could no longer continue insensible to the kindness of the good peasant; he thanked him, and accepting his offered succour, was soon furnished with that relief which the distress of his situation required. He now made some submissive excuses to Winefreada which wholly subdued her anger: she desired him to assist in preparing their night's repast; no luxurious refinement retarded the execution, and the simple cates were soon served up on the homely board.

The old man inspired with the hilarity of benevolence, sought to cheer Edbald, whom he observed depressed with pensiveness and sorrow. He spoke of the feats of

former times; of the days, when, a soldier in the armies of king Ethelwolf, he had dyed his sword in the blood of many an unbelieving Dane.

At these words the features of Edbald took another appearance. His cheeks flushed scarlet: his eyes lightened. He started from his seat, and stepped hastily to the place in which he had deposited his store of archery. He took forth an arrow; the point was blunted. He sighed; the enthusiasm of the moment was no more. He returned slowly and silently to the board.

Dunwolf eyed his motions, but spoke not for some time. At length he renewed the subject of which he had already treated.

“Edbald,” said he, “I doubt not but thou hast often heard of the well fought field of Okely. Behold this scar,” (pointing to his breast) “it is a memorial of that glorious day.”

“Honoured

"Honoured memorial!" exclaimed Edbald; "but say, good Dunwolf, why were not thy services rewarded?"

"My condition was too obscure," answered the old man. "I fought not under the eye of Ethelwolf. I was also disabled in that battle, and retired to my paternal dwelling; where, amidst the embraces of my family, I received a consolation, superior to what gratified ambition could have given me."

"Would to heaven," interrupted Elbald, "that Alfred had heard thy tale, when he had the power to reward thee!" "Report," said the old man, "gives him all kingly virtues. In his childhood I have sometimes seen him. He was a boy, nay, almost an infant, but he had the deportment of manhood. In all endowments, and all excellencies, he surpassed his brethren, who, though much older in years, were younger in wisdom and in virtue. May heaven prosper his reign, and give him

strength to resist those licentious invaders who disturb his throne, and deluge his country with blood!"

Edbald grasped his hand. "Dost thou not know," he cried in an agitated voice, "that his throne is already shaken, and overturned? That he is this moment a fugitive, secure only in being unknown? Courting obscurity to shield him from the bloodhounds that thirst for his life, and the lives of his people!"

"What sayest thou, youth?" exclaimed the old man. "Alfred a fugitive!—perhaps unhoused, unsheltered from the inclemency of this tempest.—And I, O holy saints! I, the meanest of his subjects, in comfort and repose!"

"Thou good old man!" cried Edbald,—"no, be at peace. He wanders not. He is safe from the inclemency of this tempest, and from his foes, more cruel than the tempest."

"Praise

“ Praise be to that Being who has preserved him !” returned the old man :—  
“ But say, kind Edbald, whence didst thou gain these tidings ?” “ I cannot now resolve thy question,” said Edbald. “ Perhaps in future time—but see, the dying embers proclaim night wears apace. Hie we to rest ; it is needful for thy age, and my fatigue.”

Dunwolf turned to bid Winefreda prepare his rustic couch. Slumber had locked her senses in forgetfulness. He stirred her. Angry at being awakened, in a tone where drowsiness struggled with vexation, she chid the negligence of Edbald ; and when more fully recovered from the dominion of sleep, commanded him to execute what had been required of herself.

A mysterious smile, not unnoticed by the old man, played on the countenance of Edbald. He however hastened to obey the orders of his mistress, and received

many new reproofs while he was so employed, for his awkwardness in domestic offices. Dunwolf and Winefreda retired to their homely bed, and Edbald threw himself on a mat of rushes to meditate, not sleep.

Engrossed by painful contemplation, he heeded not the waneing of the hours, till the rising sun darted its beams into the cottage. Misfortune, far from abating, had given new ardour to his piety. He arose, and thanked in terms of fervent praise, that wise and beneficent Being who had preserved his heart untainted, and his courage undepressed.

He approached the bed of Dunwolf: he observed the serenity of his repose.—“Harmless and happy peasant!” exclaimed the youth, “how enviable is thy lot, though cast amongst the meanest! No rude cares mingle with the calmness of thy sensations. Thou hast no regret for the past; thou feelest

feelest no afflicting presage for the future. Sons of pride and of ambition, ye rulers of the earth, look here. Witness the tranquillity of this old peasant, and seek, vainly seek, in your own hearts a felicity superior! —Why, O why was I not born in this humble rank?" While he spoke the blood mantled warm to his cheek.—" Selfish wish!" cried he again; " Selfish, and unworthy! Pure and sweet are the pleasures that virtue gives; let me fulfil the duties she exacts, and I shall feel them."

Fortified by that consoling thought, he quitted the cottage, and betook himself to his wonted employment of feeding the old man's herds. The morn was bright and serene. No vestige of the last night's storm remained, save the lucid drops that glittered on the foliage of the trees, and whose vivid and varying lustre vied with the products of the costly mine. The newly risen sun had streaked the East with gold and purple rays, and the birds quitting their

downy nests welcomed the return of morn with loud and cheerful notes.

The mild beauties of nature are ever a source of inexhaustible pleasure to an uncorrupted heart. Such was the heart of Edbald; it expanded, it forgot its cares, and felt nothing but the purest and most delightful emotions. Winefreda brought him his morning repast at the usual hour; and during the remainder of the day he employed his mind in recalling the events of his past life, and laying plans for the future.

As soon as the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, he returned to the cottage with his charge. Winefreda examined the herd with attention, lest some accident had happened through the negligence of their keeper. But finding her fears void of foundation, she set about preparing for their night repast with diligence and alacrity; nay, such was her unusual good disposition

position towards Edbald, that she required not his assistance.

The board was covered, and they had just seated themselves around it, when a loud knocking at the door of the cottage threw them all into consternation.

But that of Edbald was short-lived. After a momentary pause, he rushed to where his arrows were deposited, pulled one from the quiver, twanged the strings of his polished bow, and stood ready to make the daring invader repent of his intrusion. The fierce majesty of his attitude, the fiery glances of his eyes, and the frown that hung dreadful on his brow, struck terror into the heart of Winefreda. Dunwolf gazed at him, and felt fear mingled with astonishment. The noise re-doubled, and a voice was at the same moment heard uttering these words :

"If ye are born of Saxon blood, if ye have the feelings of men, admit me!"

This adjuration was too powerful to be withstood. Edbald made a sign to the old man ; he advanced to the door and opened it. Two persons entered. One was of a noble port and warlike demeanor. He was clad in a coat of shining mail ; in one hand grasped a weighty falchion, and with the other beckoned his companion to follow, who was a youth, and appeared by his habit to be an attendant on the first.

The appearance of these persons produced an instantaneous change in the deportment of Edbald.

He hastily relinquished his bow and arrow, approached the fire-place, seated himself, leant his cheek on his hand, and assumed the air of a person who was totally unconcerned and uninterested in the passing scene.

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In the mean time the noble stranger, for such he seemed, thanked the good peasant for admitting him, and apologized for his importunate intrusion. Winefreda, unaccustomed to the presence of the great, felt herself depressed, and humbled, and retired to a corner of the cottage : but Dunwolf, with honest hospitality, pressed the strangers to partake of his repast, and hinted his desire to learn what accident had reduced them to the necessity of making his hut their asylum. They accepted his offer, took their places at the board, and the elder began.

“ Obscure as is thy life,” said he, addressing Dunwolf, “ thou canst not be wholly ignorant of the misfortunes that afflict this wretched country. Know that I am of Saxon blood, and not the meanest. Thou wilt, therefore, easily conjecture that I could not tamely see my country-men butchered, my king driven from his throne, by the lawless ravagers of Denmark. The efforts,

efforts, alas, unavailing efforts! of patriotism and loyalty, have rendered me obnoxious to Guthrum, the chief of these barbarians, in a still greater degree than others, who, with the will, but not the power of resistance, have been equally loyal as myself. It matters not that I tell thee what violences I have opposed, or what snares I have escaped. Suffice it that yesternight my followers and I, were set upon by a small party of the Danes. We conquered; but apprehending that fresh enemies might pour in, we also fled, and took different routes. This youth accompanied me. The horrors of the tempest afforded us security. We sheltered ourselves from its violence beneath a rock, and took the first moment of its abating fury to pursue our fugitive course. All day have we wandered through the most unfrequented paths; night overtook us on our way: my page, less hardy than myself, was near sinking under the pressure of fatigue, when we espied a faint glimmering of light at some distance. We quickened our pace.

pace. It directed us to this cottage, where, thanks to thy humanity, we experience a more hospitable reception, than gilded palaces might have afforded us."

The stranger ceased to speak. During his discourse Edbald had betrayed many tokens of agitation, but still kept his face concealed.

At length, perceiving that Winefeda had fallen into her accustomed slumber, he arose and turned himself toward the strangers. The page fixed his eyes upon him, clapped his hands with an expression of joy, and whispered to his master.

"Great heaven! What sayest thou?" exclaimed the noble stranger. He looked at Edbald for a moment; that moment satisfied him. "It is he!—It is Alfred! my king!" cried he, throwing himself at his feet. "Brave Oddune!" replied the monarch, raising, and embracing him,—"Yes, it

it is Alfred, thy *friend* ! Forgive me, for not before disclosing myself; I dreaded that joy and surprize might have robbed thee of discretion. The event has proved my precaution just. “For this good old man,” said he, turning to Dunwolf, who had prostrated himself at his feet, “I have no doubts of his faith and secrecy. Never shall I forget what I owe to him; and if heaven once more replace me in the state which I have lost, Alfred shall repay the benefits conferred on Edbald.”

The old peasant, bereft of speech by astonishment, joy, and gratitude, could only respectfully press that hand to his lips which the monarch extended.

“My sovereign,” cried the Earl of Devon, “my friend, as thou hast condescendingly stiled thyself! how dear is that title to my heart!—Yes, I have found thee, and never, never more will we separate till our united efforts shall have re-seated thee  
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on that throne which thou wast born to fill! In search of thee did I come, though unknowing where to direct my course. My trusty band of followers, though forced by necessity to quit me for a time, are resolute and loyal. Heaven has given us an asylum, where, at the moment of our separation, I appointed them to await me. In the midst of a morass formed by the stagnating waters of the Thone and Parret, I discovered one firm spot, which the labours of my hardy adherents have nearly converted into a secure and commodious habitation; at once impregnable to the assaults of our enemies, and the inclemency of the seasons. This retreat, fortified by nature itself, which has surrounded it with inaccessible marshes, and gloomy forests, impervious to the solar beams, this retreat shall, like a summer cloud, veil my king in friendly obscurity, till the moment when, spurning concealment, he shall burst forth upon the spoilers of his country, in all the splendor of his valour!"

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The heart of Alfred palpitated with a livelier motion than usual. "Noble Oddune!" he exclaimed, "prophetic be thy words! Oh! were it given me to deliver my unhappy people, from the miseries under which they groan; to restore to them the freedom, the order, and the security, which they have lost, and to render these blessings permanent by the institutions of good policy; then should I, without regret, and without a sigh, resign to the author of my existence, that life which his beneficence had enabled me to render conducive to the happiness of my people!"

These words, worthy of the heart that dictated, and the lips which uttered them, failed not to impress his auditors with fresh sentiments of veneration and love for their patriot sovereign, who, disdaining all selfish considerations, dedicated his views and his efforts to the sole purpose of conferring felicity on his subjects. Far different from the proud tyrants of the earth, who, either

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sunk in supine indolence, doze away the blessings of existence without being conscious of their possession ; or with a more pernicious activity, in the pursuit of self-gratification, spurn the claims of humanity, benevolence, and all the virtues ; while that object, to which they point their views, still eludes them, and at every succeeding effort flies more swiftly than before.

The Earl of Devon now presented his page to the notice of the king. "This youth," he cried, "merits the condescension of Alfred, both by his misfortunes and his worth. He is of illustrious birth, and, what may cause thee matter of surprize, of Danish parentage. Another time, when leisure permits, his own lips shall acquaint thee with the events that have reduced him from an exalted rank in his own country, to dependance and obscurity in ours."

Alfred graciously raised the youth, who had knelt at his feet, and enquired by what appellation he should call him.

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"He has renounced the errors of his ancestors," replied the Earl of Devon, "and with his Christian faith, has acquired the name of Ethelbert, by which I answered for him at the holy font."

"Wilt thou resign thy right in him to me?" asked the monarch, smiling.

Oddune looked assentingly, and made a sign to the youth, who seizing the king's hand, pressed it respectfully to his forehead, and to his lips, and exclaimed, "Yes, to the first of monarchs, and of men, Ethelbert willingly resigns the conduct of his future fate!"

He had scarcely spoken when Winefreda awoke. But the presence of the strangers prevented her from following her wonted custom of reprehending Edbald. In silence therefore she prepared her husband's bed with all the nicety which her scanty means would allow, and invited the strangers to refresh

refresh their wearied limbs by needful repose.

This invitation Oddune firmly, but courteously refused. Ethelbert would have imitated him, but for the united entreaties of the Earl, Alfred, and the old peasant. At length, therefore, consenting, he took possession of the couch of Dunwolf, while that good man, himself refusing rest, obliged Winefreda to retire to the mat of rushes, occupied the preceding night by a *monarch*.

Equally secure now from interruption or discovery, Alfred, and the Earl of Devon, conferred, without restraint, on the steps necessary to be taken for the dispersion of the Danes, and the deliverance of the kingdom.

They determined to pursue their journey, with the dawn, to that asylum which the Earl had described; and Dunwolf fur-

nished the latter with a cloak of homely stuff, which, by concealing his armour, might prevent discovery or suspicion, though the unfrequented route they had to pursue was nearly a sufficient security in itself.

At the first light of morn the Earl awoke his page. Alfred bound his quiver to his shoulder, and slung his bow on one arm, while the other sustained a ponderous club ; then embracing the old man, and renewing his assurances of protection and reward, should heaven smile on his endeavours, he sallied forth from his late asylum, accompanied by the earl and his page, and followed by the benedictions of the faithful Dunwolf.

The royal traveller and his companions journeyed without cessation, till mid-day ; when finding the beams of the sun shot too powerful a heat to be any longer sustained, they betook themselves to a lonely

spot, where the shade of some wild and luxuriant shrubs promised them, at once, refreshment and repose.

They seated themselves on the earth; and Ethelbert took, from a scrip which he carried on his shoulder, some cates, the produce of Winefreda's domestic thrift, which the good old peasant had supplied him with at parting. A book, which ran gurgling through the thickets, afforded them a grateful, through simple beverage, and they partook of it with thankfulness and satisfaction.

At the conclusion of their repast, Alfred arose. The page committed the fragments of their meal to the scrip, and, with the Earl, followed the example of the king.

As they pursued their journey, Alfred turned suddenly to Ethelbert. " Youth," said he, the Earl of Devon has promised that

that thou shalt recount to me the story of thy life. No opportunity can occur more suited to the recital than the present time ; it will beguile the tediousness of the way, and I have now the power of giving thee that attention which it requires, and which future circumstances may take from me."

The page bent his head assentingly. "Great Prince," said he, before I recount to thee the story of my own life, it is necessary that I relate the adventures of my parents, for mine are the consequences of theirs ; and to understand them well, thou shouldest be first acquainted with the circumstances which led to them. Yet do I fear, that the unavoidable length of the narration may fatigue thee." "Be under no apprehension," interrupted the king, smiling, "Our journey affords us sufficient time, and I expect to be rather delighted, than wearied by thy discourse."

Ethebert

Ethelbert, satisfied by this assurance, mused for a few moments to recollect himself, and then began in the following words :

*The Narration of ETHELBERT.*

“ILLUSTRIous prince,” said he, “thou knowest that Guthrum, present chief of the Danish invaders, is the second son of Ivar, monarch of Denmark. That king had also a brother named Sitric, who was blessed by heaven with one son; I say blessed, for his heroic valour, and many virtues, well consoled him for the deprivation of a more numerous offspring.

“Harold, so was he called, formed an early attachment with his young any royal kinsman, Guthrum. This attachment ripened with their growing years. Their sports, their pleasures, and their afflictions, were the same; even the disposition of each,

though originally different, received a tincture of similitude from the other.

" The leading feature of Guthrum's character was a fierceness that brooked neither controul nor reproof. He was brave; but his valour degenerated into ferocity, and knew none of that gentle mixture which distinguishes the human from the brutal nature. Generous to his friends, but implacable to those who offended him, where his pride, or his passions, were concerned, he would have risqued the most imminent danger to oblige the former, or to avenge himself of the latter. Nature had endued him with a form, marked with the prevailing propensities of his soul. His stature exceeded the ordinary height of men, and was proportioned with exactness. His countenance, though handsome, had a ferocious and haughty appearance even in his mildest moments. The first view of his person generally excited admiration; but at the second, the beholder felt an involuntary

voluntary dread, mingled with disgust. Such was Guthrum ; and when I describe his kinsman, it will afford matter for surprise, that spirits so widely different should, even under the influence of amity, move in unison.

“ The face of Hareld was a lively and legible portrait of the soul which gave it intelligence. The beauty and harmony of his features could only be exceeded by that air of mingled ingenuousness and benevolence which constantly adorned them. His person was noble, graceful, and commanding. Nature, to him, had been unsparing of her gifts ; nor did his deportment abuse them. The graces of his form were but types of his intellectual endowments. Mild as the summer breeze that fans the floweret ;—yielding to every impression of sensibility. By true valour rendered capable of enacting deeds which might emulate the darings of those heroes to whom my countrymen pay a religious veneration.”

At this passage of his story the voice of Ethelbert became suffocated by rising sobs.—“ Pardon, O king,” he cried in interrupted accents, “ pardon my emotions.—Harold, this pattern for the human race, the God-like Harold, he was my father, and he lives no more !”

The piety of the youth affected Alfred. “ He deserves thy tears,” said he, soothingly ; “ yet Ethelbert, though not thy sire by natural ties, behold in me one who will claim thy affection by paternal deeds.”

The feelings of grateful acknowledgment enlivened the countenance of the youth ; and with a gesture, which expressed much more than utterance could have done, he seized the hand of Alfred and bowed upon it. Then dashing away the moisture that still trembled in his eyes, he recovered composure enough, in a few moments, to continue his narration.

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"The strict friendship," said he, which subsisted between Harold, and prince Guthrum, rendered them inseparable.— Often were the savage tenants of the forests disturbed in their gloomy retreats by these fearless associates. The prowling wolf, and the ferocious bear, oft felt the keenness of their darts ; and from having been destroyers, became victims of man.

Hunting, as an image of war, was the amusement in which they most delighted. To enjoy their favourite sport, in its full perfection, they determined to quit the court for some time, and to repair to the pine-clad hills of Norway with a few attendants.

Here, in a verdant spot, watered by glassy rivulets, they pitched their tents. The first dawn of morn ushered them to the chace ; and at the setting of the sun, they returned to their temporary abode, where the social feast, a recapitulation of

the dangers they had passed, and the exploits they had atchieved, filled up the intervening moments, and invigorated them for the toils of the ensuing day.

They had remained in this place some time, when an incident at length occurred, which fixed the colour of their future fate.

Once, in pursuing their accustomed employment, the prince and Harold, hurried on by youthful ardour, were separated from their attendants. Harold sounded his horn ; no answering sound returned. He repeated the signal ; still an awful silence reigned. The sun had withdrawn his fertilizing beams, and the variegated streaks which painted the western horizon, and marked the place of his setting, became less vivid in their tincts each moment. At length they totally disappeared, and a grey mist skirting the hills forewarned them to seek

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an asylum against the dangers of approaching night.

Fear could not assail hearts so courageous. After once more sounding their horns, without giving way to vain complaints, they determined to quit the hills, whose shady coverts harboured many savage enemies, and to seek the plain.

As they proceeded on their way, the moon arose in full splendor and guided them along. All at once they heard, or thought they heard, the sound of human voices. Hope inspired them with fresh vigour; they quickened their steps to the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and again the horn was applied to the lips of Harold. A scream of mingled surprize and joy instantaneously followed the blowing of the horn.

They rushed forward. A second scream, but one of horror and despair,

saluted their ears, and soon they perceived an object which excited their pity and required their assistance.

A female form lay on the earth, weltering in gore, and seemingly devoid of life, while a person (who, by the glittering weapon he held in his hand, appeared to have perpetrated the horrid deed) fled with precipitation across the vale.

Harold and Guthrum followed the respective movements of their souls. The former advanced to the maiden with an intent to succour her, if not yet past human aid, and the prince pursued the assassin.

A near view of the wounded lady joined admiration to that pity which already informed the breast of Harold. Imagination could not conceive a more perfect form, or more lovely features; and the deep and death-like swoon into which she was plunged,

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ed, far from abating her beauties, rendered them more interesting and more attractive.

A new sentiment possessed the soul of Harold; instinctively he raised her in his arms, and to his inexpressible joy discovered, that the crimson stream which had struck him with a horrid apprehension, flowed only from a large wound in her arm.

Transported to find that she might yet recover to light and life, he forgot every thing in gazing at her loveliness, which this temporary death had not been able to extinguish.

At length recollection returned, and he sought to bind the wound. A cincture of various dyes, which embraced her slender waist, presented itself for that purpose. He loosened it from its present position, and tied it round the wound.

This work of humanity was not long concluded when the maiden moved ; and after breathing a deep sigh, opened her eyes. She turned them wildly on Harold ; her recollection was not yet restored. In a little time she became sensible of her situation, and virgin modesty actuated her to withdraw from the arms of her preserver, for such his attitude, and the expression of his countenance proved him.

The delicacy of Harold's soul prevented him from opposing her movement, except by words. " Loveliest of women !" cried he, in gentle accents, " dread no insult, apprehend no wrong, from him who would freely hazard his own existence, to guard thine from every ill."

The beauteous maiden returned him a glance of sweet acknowledgment ; but suddenly her bosom heaved, her eyes became suffused with tears ; she clasped her hands, and in a tone of agony exclaimed, " My father,

father, O my father! ere this, perhaps, thou hast fallen a sacrifice to base revenge!"

"Where dwells he!" cried Harold eagerly, I will fly to assist him!"

Revived hope gave her strength. "O come, most generous stranger!" cried she, springing from the ground, I will guide thy steps."

Harold instantly arose, grasped his lance, and rushed after the maiden. At that moment prince Guthrum appeared in view. He had overtaken the assassin and pierced him with a mortal stroke; then severing his head from his body, he took it by the blood-stained tresses, in his left hand, and hastened to regain his companion.

The fierceness of his aspect, and the horrible trophy which he bore, terrified

the gentle spirit of the lady : she shrieked, and with an involuntary motion, threw herself into the arms of Harold.

The prince came near. Her visible terror offended him. "Damsel," cried he, in resentful accents, "is it thus thou thankest thy avenger? Behold the head of thy enemy ; his corse lies prostrate on the earth, and to this arm thou owest his fall!"

These words were not calculated to remove the first impressions of horror and disgust which the lady had received. They however banished all fears for her personal safety ; and, after apologizing for her causeless terror, the idea of her father instantly recurred.

She flew forward. Harold followed her steps ; and the prince, though ignorant from whence her haste proceeded, took the same course.

After passing in this manner through several windings, the maiden took a path which appeared to be the work of man. In a few moments they came within sight of a habitation, whose structure marked the opulence of the owner. Several persons, in the habit of attendants, were seen rushing different ways, with wandering steps and distracted aspects.

One of them happened to espy the damsel and her companions; loud shouts testified their joy and surprize. In a few moments a croud of male and female domestics surrounded and hailed their mistress.

“ My father—does he live? Is he safe?” exclaimed she, unmindful of their congratulations. “ Both, both,” they replied, “ but overwhelmed with affliction for thy loss.”

She heard no more, but sprang forward to the entrance of the dwelling, where, extended

tended on the earth, lay a venerable man, whose deep and heart-rending groans manifested the feelings of a parent.

“Mourn no more, mourn no more, my father,” cried she, kneeling and embracing him, “behold thy Gunilda, behold her returned to thy parental bosom, unstained and safe! Thanks to the preserving Gods, and these my generous deliverers!”

The venerable Volugar, (so was he called) appeared for some time to doubt the reality of what he saw. But the tender embrace of his living daughter soon assured him. He raised himself, gazed at her for a moment, and then folded her to his breast with fondness unutterable.

“Yes, my beloved,” he cried, “the Gods have preserved thee! Image as thou art of their purity, could they suffer thee to be defiled? No, they are ever just, and thou art restored. May those celestial

celestial beings pour on the heads of the generous strangers, who were the instruments of their protection, every good which is in the power of Omnipotence to bestow !

This tender scene appeared even to move the stern soul of Guthrum. He accepted the thanks of Volugar with an unusual softness. His heart was touched ; the ferocity of his brow relaxed into an expression of mildness and joy. In fine, his disposition appeared to have undergone a total change. Alas ! that change was but temporary, and followed by destruction !

So if amidst the horrors of a tempest one gleam of sunshine intervenes, the unwary traveller trusting the deluding calm, hies from the hospitable covert which has afforded him a shelter. Sudden the loud wind roars. A black cloud hovers o'er his head with formidable umbrage. It bursts :—he hears the awful thunder roll, and

and sees the livid lightning glare around him.

Harold shared the notice of Volugar, (who was soon made acquainted with the quality of his guests) and wholly occupied Gunilda's attentions. Their souls appeared to move in unison ; each look, each action spoke their mutual feelings, and love seemed to have already gained an absolute empire in their hearts.

While they willingly resigned themselves to those pleasing but dangerous sensations, Volugar's attendants covered the festal board, and himself began to relate the cause of that revenge to which his daughter had nearly fallen the victim.

A chief, named Fengo, who was also a kinsman to Volugar, had demanded Gunilda in marriage for his son. But the character of her intended spouse, savage, haughty, and imperious, suited not the gentle

gentle spirit of the maiden. In the bosom of her fond sire she disclosed her reluctance to the proposal; and he, unwilling to compel his age's darling, instantly rejected it.

The proud Hinguar, so was her suitor called, determined to obtain, by force, what persuasion had failed to acquire ; he watched the moment of unguarded security, and carried her off from the peaceful habitation of her father.

The followers of Volugar pursued the ravisher, and delivered Gunilda from his power. In the fray which ensued, Hinguar received a mortal wound, and his death soon followed. Fengo, on the first intelligence of this event, betrayed the most pungent affliction ; but the violence of his sorrow appeared in a short time to subside. He visited the dwelling of Volugar, desired that their amity might be again renewed, lamented the death of his son, but allowed it to be no more than a just punishment of  
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the crime he had attempted to perpetrate.

The good and unsuspecting Volugar believed his words, welcomed him with a fraternal joy, and called on his daughter to join her best endeavours to his, for the comfort and consolation of his guest.

But that treacherous guest harboured the blackest designs under the mask of confidence and friendship. In order to forward the dire purpose of his heart, he affected to receive even more pleasure from the society of Gunilda than of her sire: her sprightly converse could alone beguile him of his sorrows; nought but the sweet strains of her melodious voice could lull him to repose.

The guiltless maid, won by the affection he professed, became his inseparable companion: she imagined it behoved her, who had been the innocent cause of the misfortune

fortune he bewailed, to use all her gentle powers in order to banish it for ever from his mind.

On the evening of that night in which she had been rescued from the stroke of death, Fengo entreated her to wander with him through the shades that surrounded the dwelling of Volugar. Fearless of ill, she complied. He prolonged their walk till the moon arose in her majestic splendor. Suspicion yet invaded not Gunilda's breast; but fearing lest her tender sire might be alarmed by her stay, she at length proposed returning. They were now at a considerable distance from the dwelling of Volugar.

"No, thou shalt never return!" cried Fengo, with a look that froze her soul. "No, sorceress, my son, my murdered Hinguar calls aloud for vengeance, and I hasten to satisfy his shade!"

At these words he took her forcibly in his arms, and rushing onward with the utmost

most rapidity, ceased not till he arrived at that spot where heaven sent Guthrum and Harold to her aid. Here he prepared to perpetrate his dreadful purpose. "To thee," cried he, drawing forth a poniard which had lain concealed in his bosom, "to thee I owe the loss of my son, and now comes the moment of retribution!"

He lifted his arm,—Gunilda, rendered immovable by terror, sought not to resist. But the stroke was deferred: he paused, and a ray of hope cheered her fainting soul.

That suspension, however, was not caused by pity: he meditated how to render death more terrible.

"I am childless," cried he, "thy sire shall be also childless! but thy blood alone cannot satisfy my revenge. Volugar,—he shall first behold this poniard ensanguined  
by

by thy vital stream. He shall learn who poured the crimson drops, and then—”

Gunilda interrupted him with a piercing cry ; the danger of her sire quickly restored to her the power of utterance. “ O merciless and cruel,” she exclaimed, “ cannot my death suffice? My father! thou wilt not kill my father ! ”

At that instant the hunting horn of Harold resounded through the hills. Gunilda uttered a joyful cry, and hope giving her strength, she suddenly betook herself to flight from her intended murderer. But the base Fengo, being sensible this moment must decide her fate, or his, redoubled his usual speed ; and just at the second blowing of the horn arrested her steps. The voices of Guthrum and of Harold were that moment distinctly heard. Self apprehension unnerved his arm ; he aimed an uncertain stroke, and fled.

Thus

Thus ended the narration. Gunilda had recited the conclusion in which she had borne so dangerous a share. Harold hung delighted on her words. The melody of her accents thrilled his soul with unutterable emotions. At the passages where she described her most imminent danger he shuddered with horror: he would have spoken, would have declared his detestation of Fengo's barbarity, but he feared to interrupt her voice by the sound of his own.

While he thus indulged the feelings of a new born passion, the harsher soul of Guthrum too became subdued. He gazed ardently at Gunilda, but had the mortification to find that her glances were more frequently directed to Harold than to himself.

A spirit haughty as his could ill brook so evident a preference of one whom he imagined his inferior. Yet he kept silence,

nor

nor did his dissatisfaction appear, otherwise than by the resumed ferocity of his looks.

The good Volugar entreated his illustrious guests to take the refreshment of a short repose before they proceeded to seek their followers, a design the prince avowed.

Gunilda had retired, and Harold readily acquiesced; but Guthrum, with an increased sternness of voice and deportment, still refused, till at length the continued persuasions of Volugar wearied him into compliance.

One apartment held the prince and Harold. Equally prevented from repose though by different sensations, a long silence on the part of both, was followed by Harold's exclaiming, "How good is Volugar! how beautiful is Gunilda! Should we not, O friend, return incessant thanks to heaven for rendering us instrumental in preserving

serving the tranquillity of these amiable persons?"

"*Thou*, indeed," replied Guthrum, in a tone that marked the temper of his mind, "thou shouldest return acknowledgments, for *thou* hast been highly favoured. But for me, true, I bereaved Fengo of existence, and what is my reward?—The scornful maid averts her countenance. She heeds not my accents; she turns her eyes disdainfully from my glances, while she eagerly seeks thine!"

"Guthrum, my friend," exclaimed Harold, "from thy lips proceed these sounds!"

"Why doubtest thou?" returned Guthrum haughtily. "Is not thy soul elated at the preference?—I, the son of a king, I am scorned, and thou art loved!"

"Am I loved?" cried Harold, with an involuntary transport. He paused. "Grant  
I were

I were loved," added he, more composed, " Guthrum would not envy me the love of Gunilda?"

" Perhaps *I* also love Gunilda." " If thou dost," replied Harold, " I wonder not. But, O my friend! let not that passion destroy our long-held amity. When the tumults of hope or fear assail thy breast, think that mine feels conflicts similar. Perhaps the heart of Gunilda may be alike indifferent to both our suits. Yet should she prefer one; should that one be thee, I swear by all we hold most holy, that Harold shall not murmur at her award, or seek to interrupt thy happiness."

" O generous vow!" exclaimed Guthrum, in a tone of irony, " Thou wilt not murmur at her award,—Conscious, full conscious art thou, her award can only bring happiness to *thee*! But mark me, youth, flatter not thyself *that* happiness shall be uninterrupted. The spirit of

Guthrum brooks not that submission, well suited to thy softer soul. Know, that the same moment which assures thee of a mistress, shall deprive thee for ever of a friend ! Nay, more—his wonted affection shall be converted into the bitterest enmity, and most unceasing hate. I love Gunilda. I felled her intended murderer to the earth. To my arm will she owe her future safety. Mark well my words ; they speak the unalterable sentiments of my soul. Either relinquish all hopes of uniting thy fate with *hers*, who should be only mine, or renounce my friendship for ever !” Mingled sensations of surprize, indignation, and concern, took from Harold the power of reply.

“ Unjust as thou now art,” cried he at length, I cannot yet cease to regard thee as the Guthrum I *once knew*. My heart cannot yet divest itself of that attachment, which displayed itself in infant fondness, and riper amity. Think, O Guthrum, think

think for a moment of the toils, of the pleasures we have passed. Think how insupportable had been those toils, how unsatisfactory those pleasures, had we not borne an equal share in each. And yet thou canst say, with stern accents, with unmoved brow, canst say, “ Harold, renounce my friendship !”

“ Art thou content then to resign Gunilda ?” asked Guthrum, hastily.

“ Let the voice of Gunilda decide,” replied Harold, after a short pause. “ If thou art the object of her choice, I will still be thy friend ; if I am favoured, thou hast said, thou wilt not be mine.”

Guthrum appeared irresolute. Harold extended his hand.

The Prince (though still with an expression half reluctant) accepted it.

"Let us," said he, "bring our fates to a speedy issue. On the morrow we will both declare our sentiments, and 'till then I will be thy friend."

To the soul of Harold, tender as infancy, this trifling respite was some consolation: and now neither love nor jealousy could resist the impulse of weariness; they sunk into a deep slumber, which lasted a considerable time.

They were at length awakened by the well known sounds of their followers hunting horns. Pleased and surprized, they instantly arose, and went forth, where they were saluted by their attendants with loud and joyful shouts.

Volugar soon joined them. They learned, that directed by their discourse of the preceding night, he had dispatched messengers to the tents with orders for the hunters to repair to his habitation.

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The Prince and Harold failed not to pay him the acknowledgments which such a mark of generous attention merited. He replied, that all things were due to the preservers of his daughter; and so saying, led them to a chamber, where the domestic care of the blooming Gunilda had provided a necessary repast.

At the sight of Harold, joy enlightened her love-inspiring countenance. She saluted each, but the keen penetration of jealousy discovered to Guthrum the different expression of her salutations. Not able to restrain the emotions that agitated his soul, he turned to Harold. “On this moment,” he cried, “depends our friendship, or our enmity!”

Harold replied not, but sighing deeply, fixed his eyes on the earth. The lovely Gunilda trembled at the apprehension of an ill, of which she could not divine the

cause. Guthrum suffered her not to continue in suspense.

"I love thy daughter," said he, addressing Volugar.

"Harold also loves her. I have destroyed her enemy, and thine. Let her lips decide the fate of our pretensions."

The haughty tone in which these words were uttered, was not calculated to win the favour of Volugar, or of his daughter. Gunilda spoke not, but regarded her Sire with a timid and submissive air.

"Ever dutious," said he, "I understand thy looks. Thou wouldest submit thy inclinations to mine. Retire, my child, and fear not that thy obedience will be put to too severe a test."

As soon as she had quitted the chamber, he spoke again.

"Brave

"Brave Prince," said he, addressing Guthrum, "the honour which thy suit, and that of thy noble kinsman, confers on my daughter and myself, at the same time that it gratifies the utmost pride of my soul, fills me with perplexity. Ye were both the preservers of Gunilda; the attentive care of Harold secured her life, and thy unerring arm deprived her cruel enemy of breath. Both have well deserved her; yet in favouring the love of one, shall I not wrong the other.

"Thou dost hesitate then?" interrupted Guthrum. "True, Prince," replied Volugar, "where the merits are equal, there is room for hesitation."

Yet Volugar spoke not all his thoughts. The mildness of Harold attracted his affection with the same force, that the fierceness of Guthrum repelled it. Already had he chosen the spouse of Gunilda; but the same motives that actuated his choice,

rendered him apprehensive of disclosing it.

Different emotions agitated the breasts of Harold and of Guthrum during his silence. The former hoped a favourable sentence, yet dreaded the moment of its arrival, since that which was to gratify love, must give friendship an incurable wound.

At length Volugar spoke. "At present," said he, "an equality of merit keeps me in suspense; but I have thought of an expedient by which that uncertainty may be removed. One year shall the decision be delayed; and he, who in that time shall atchieve the most heroic deed, may at its conclusion claim the hand of Gunilda as the reward of his virtues."

These words relieved Harold from the weight of anxiety that had oppressed him, and in a tone of satisfaction and cheerfulness

ness he acceded to the proposition. But Guthrum betrayed no tokens of such facility. The inbred haughtiness of his soul taught him to consider himself as superior to competition; and the irresolution of Volugar insulted his pride in a still greater degree, than the apparent partiality of Gunilda for his kinsman affected his heart. His feelings were not shrouded by dissimulation; the same height of pride, which endued him with ferocity, made him scorn all disguise, and he openly avowed his sentiments.

This avowal, by renewing the apprehensions of Volugar, rendered him more fixed to abide by the expedient he had offered; but, willing to conciliate the disposition of Guthrum, he summoned Gunilda, and commanded her to offer parting gifts to the acceptance of his guests.

The lovely maiden executed the command with alacrity. Actuated by a secret

sign from her Sire, she approached Guthrum first, and, with an air of easy grace, fastened to his side a massy falchion of resplendent steel, by a belt interwoven with gold, the work of her skilful hands. This done, she advanced to Harold ; but more embarrassed was her air, more sensibility appeared in her movements. A rosy dye suffused her countenance, while she threw over his shoulder a costly scarf, the chief production of her industrious loom.

The heart of Harold experienced full content, and Guthrum appeared more satisfied. They bade farewell to Volugar and his daughter, and with their followers, (who had not been unnoticed by the bounty of their generous host) took their way to the hills. After giving a few days to the chace, they quitted Norway, and hastened to court, intent on seeking some occasion of rendering themselves worthy of Gunilda.

Mindful of duty, they disclosed to their respective Sires the adventures in which they had been engaged during their absence. The King and Sitric were well acquainted with the name of Volugar. To the advantage of an illustrious birth, he had added in his youth, the fame of heroic actions; and the early part of his life had been as much devoted to the exertions of activity and valour, as the latter, to the enjoyment of a calm repose, the well-earned fruit of his toils. Chief of a numerous and warlike tribe, though incapacitated himself, by age and feebleness, from deeds of hardihood, he yet animated his followers by his counsel, though he ceased to guide them by his example; and no band of warriors, amongst the hardy sons of Scandinavia, reaped a fairer fame than the adherents of Volugar. Ivar and Sitric beheld the loves of their children without anger, but with concern. Each applauded the wisdom of Volugar in protracting the decision, for each hoped that

the passion of one of the competitors might be weakened by time and absence.

Mean while the illustrious friends and rivals burned with a desire to signalize themselves in the pursuit of glory. A fit opportunity soon presented itself. The restless spirit of emigration was captivated by the delightful picture, which those invaders, who had already disturbed England by their depredations, gave of that happy country. Numerous bands of martial youth flocked from all quarters, and demanded of the King a leader of royal blood, to conduct them in an enterprize of the same nature.

The King named Guthrum for their chief, and at the same time, led by an unjust partiality, prohibited Harold from sharing in the expedition, under pretence that the safety of the state was concerned in the retention of so able a support.

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This pretence deceived neither Guthrum or Harold ; and the Prince's pride (which disdained the thought of owing his good fortune to a want of emulation) induced him to use his most earnest entreaties against the resolution of his Sire. But the King was not to be moved, either by his persuasions, or the resentment of Sitric, and of Harold ; and the fleet sailed without the latter.

The indignation of Sitric was so great, that he thought of retiring from the presence of his brother; but the dissuasions of Harold prevented that purpose from being effected.

" My father," he cried, " perhaps the Gods will even *here* present the opportunity we wish for."

His words were prophetic.—Saxo, a potent chief, desired the daughter of the King in marriage; but that monarch, who was already jealous of the power he possessed,

sessed, wished not to encrease it by an alliance with the throne, and accordingly refused his demand. The proud chief resented this denial so highly, that he was forbid the presence of Ivar.

There wanted but this step to enflame his indignation to its utmost bound. He quitted the court, assembled his adherents, painted to them the wrongs he had sustained, and required their aid to obtain him vengeance.

Attached to his interest by the ties of the most solemn oaths\*, and still more by affection, they hesitated not to assure him of their fidelity and assistance.

Prudent in his resentment, he proceeded not to open force till he had won many disaffected chiefs to his party. His designs were then avowed, and the King trembled

\* See the treatise of Tacitus on the Manners of the ancient Germans.

at the apprehension of that danger he had wilfully incurred.

Harold, ever generous and loyal, assembled the faithful tribe of which he was chief, and exhorted them to defend the King with the same zeal they manifested towards his Sire and himself.

Loud acclamations betokened their approbation of his words, and with one voice they bade him lead them against the rebels. But before that could be accomplished, Saxo, favoured by the obscurity of the night, made himself master of the person of the King at a time when he least expected such an attempt, and was engaged in convivial festivity with the nobles of his court.

That monarch had now leisure to lament the affront which he had offered Harold, and which he imagined had wholly detached him from his interest. Fritigern, his eldest

eldson son, was absent on an expedition into Sweden, with whom Denmark was at war. Guthrum was too distant to afford him succour, and the tender years of his remaining offspring allowed him no hope of relief from them. He saw therefore no resource, but to comply with the demands of his enemy, which success had rendered more exorbitant. This was a submission which his pride could not brook, and he considered captivity as a degradation inferior.

His deliverance was effected by that hand, from which he least expected such a boon. The brave Harold, whose virtues gained him many adherents, beside those who were attached to him by the bands of fealty, soon acquired a sufficient force, not only to resist, but assault the rebels. Saxo, emboldened by his late success, and the consciousness of superior numbers, hastened to meet him. Bloody was the conflict that ensued ; but the valour and good fortune

tune of Harold conquered all resistance. Saxo felt the weight of his arm ; his companions\*, faithful to the last, fell in slaughtered heaps around his corse, and the remainder of his vanquished forces saved themselves by flight. Harold had the satisfaction of restoring Ivar to liberty, a satisfaction which could only be felt by a mind generous as his own.

Not content with the great action he had atchieved, lie pursued the fugitive adherents of Saxo with such vigour and activity, that they were deprived of every resource, and submitted without resistance. They now experienced, that his clemency was not inferior to his valour ; and an incident that happened at that time, placed the generosity of his character in a more conspicuous point of view than ever. Wittigild, the brother of Saxo, had be-

\* I distinguish by that name those persons, who, according to Tacitus, were bound to fight in defence of their chief, or even to die beside him.

come after his death leader of the insurgents. As he advanced, under pretence of delivering up his arms to Harold, he seized the moment of unguarded confidence, and aimed a blow at his heart, which the confusion of guilt rendered impotent.

The companions of Harold would have sacrificed him on the spot; but that chief, with his usual magnanimity, prevented their purpose, and, turning to Wittigild, inquired what could have induced him to so treacherous an attempt.

“ My brother fell by thy hand,” cried Wittigild, with a gloomy air. “ That event,” replied Harold, “ should have made thee my enemy, but ought not to have converted thee into an assassin. Yet thou didst love thy brother, and I forgive thee.—Thou canst not appear before the King without imminent hazard of thy life.—Fly, therefore, fly, while thou hast yet

yet the power, and bear this reflexion with thee ; that Harold, unimpelled by malice, slew Saxo in the field ;—that now following the suggestions of his own heart, in the pride of victory, and of power, he assures thy safety, regardless of thy meditated wrongs.”

At these words, Wittigild lost all his fierceness. “ Generous chief,” he replied, in a softened tone, “ yes, I will recall thy magnanimity, at the same moment I detest the occasion that brought it to my knowledge,” “ May the King of men, Odin, the hero and the God, may he give to Wittigild the future power of requiting thy generosity !”

No sooner had he spoken, than Harold caused his arms to be restored ; and giving him the choice of his attendants from amongst the captives, dismissed him from the camp, at the same time issuing strict orders

orders that none of the soldiers, under pain of death, should molest his retreat.

The King received Harold with every outward testimony of gratitude and joy. He solicited and obtained a reconciliation with Sitric, and confessed himself indebted to his son for his crown and life.

While these things passed in Denmark Prince Guthrum arrived in England, and soon joined his forces to those of Hinguar and Hubba. The English, sunk in a supine lethargy, attempted to buy off the invaders by costly gifts, imprudently offering to the view of rapacity those riches of which it came in search.

But why, my royal auditor, should I dwell on matters of which thou hast attained more perfect knowledge? Suffice it then to say, that when induced by the easiness of conquest to obtain a more permanent settlement, they penetrated still farther into th

the kindom ; their high-raised hopes were crushed by the valour of Ethelwolf, who, by the victory of Okely, rescued his people from present oppression and insult, and forced the invaders to retire in haste to their ships, now their only refuge from the conqueror.

This disappointment affected none so sensibly as Guthrum. The plunder with which his vessels were stored, could not console him for the disgrace which had attended his arms, and nothing but the most urgent necessity could have prevailed on him to quit the British shore ; that shore where he had hoped to acquire the brightest laurels of renown.

But when he arrived in Denmark, with what fresh anguish and vexation did the glory of Harold impress him !

His affection for his kinsman had decreased imperceptibly since the adventure  
of

of Gunilda; every remaining trace of amity now vanished, and he attempted not to conceal the total change that had taken place in his sentiments.

That change was, to Harold, a source of inexpressible uneasiness and grief. Had Gunilda appeared to favour Guthrum, he would have yielded his pretensions without waiting the decision of Volugar; but her partiality for himself had been too well marked to escape the penetration of love, and that preference was too dear to his heart to be relinquished.

The time of probation approached to a conclusion at the arrival of Guthrum. The king invited Volugar from his retreat, under pretence of doing him and Gunilda honour. But the event shewed that the invitation sprung from another motive.

Volugar shortly appeared at court with his daughter and a numerous train of followers.

lowers. Convivial festivities and martial sports filled up the intervening time to the day of trial.

It arrived. The noblest chiefs of Denmark attended. Volugar and Gunilda were seated in the midst of the assembly. The candidates approached, tendered their obeisance, and retired a few paces back. The king then advanced and pleaded the merit of his son. He enumerated, in a long and artful discourse, the spoils he had amassed in England; how he had added to the splendour of the state by the acquirement of these riches, and finally imputed the defeat at Okely not to a deficiency of valour or activity, but to the malice of some evil dæmon, who envied the good fortune of Guthrum. Sitric now came forward. When he mentioned the name of Harold an universal murmur of applause pervaded the assembly. Truth requires little embellishment; and a simple relation of facts, to which his auditors and fame bore testimony,

sufficed to assure him of all the success he wished.

Volugar arose. "Prince," said he, addressing Guthrum who now stood before him, "thy valour cannot be questioned, but I promised Gunilda to him who should atchieve the most heroic deed. Heroism consists not alone in the display of personal valour. Clemency and forbearance should unite with courage to form the character of a perfect hero. These did Harold evince, when superior to resentment or revenge, he nobly pardoned the daring Wittigild, who had raised his hand to deprive him of existence!—I give thee my daughter," he cried, turning to Harold, and in bestowing her, I confer a benefit of no common value. Cherish her—but why should I caution thee, of whose worth I am assured? In saying thus, he joined the hands of Harold and Gunilda.

Guthrum,

Guthrum, during the preceding discourse, stood fixed and silent. A gloomy frown hung dreadful on his brow, and his countenance plainly testified the tumults that agitated his mind. The action of Volugar took from him all traces of forbearance.

"And canst thou," he impetuously cried,—"canst thou even, in the presence of the King, insult his son?"

"Old man, thy years protect thee from my vengeance.—But let not this smooth dissembler hope also to escape me!—Here," continued he, waving his hand, "here do I discard all fond remains of that mistaken amity which once I cherished, and from this moment vow to bear him most deadly and unceasing hate! Odin, King of men, to thee I swear—accept, and ratify my words!"

"I," cried Harold, while a noble indignation animated his countenance, "I

cannot hate thee, Guthrum ; but I will love thee no longer."

" O hypocrite!" exclaimed Guthrum, drawing his falchion from his side, " come forth.—If yet thou bearest the spirit of a man—come forth, and let our swords decide !"

The forbearance of Harold was no more. He advanced to his adversary with a threatening aspect. The gentle Gunilda shrieked. The King, Sitric, and Volugar, interposed between the rivals, and prevented their purpose by force. The former, then turning with an air of anger to his son, reproved him loudly, and commanded a party of armed men to surround and guard him, till the nuptials of Harold and Gunilda were solemnized. The Prince, foaming with rage, was led off by his guards ; and Ivar, after fixing the nuptials at four days distance, broke up the assembly,

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The injurious language, and deportment of Guthrum, could alone have restored Harold to peace with himself; and he now felt all the delight, which the certainty of possessing Gunilda's affection could give him, without any mixed alloy of concern or regret.

The nuptial morn arrived. The place destined for the celebration of the rites was a grove consecrated to Odin. Volugar led his daughter forward. Ivar, Sitric, and Harold, followed by a train of noble chiefs, entered the sacred grove.

Harold and Gunilda advanced to the altar of Odin, and prostrated themselves before the image of the God. The chief priest raised, and placed them beside him, and then commanded the inferior priests and scalds to commence the sacred rites. The mysterious songs began; the victims were brought forward and slain, and the chief priest inspected their entrails. His

frame became agitated ; his limbs seemed to shudder with an holy horror. All at once his whole appearance changed. The blood mounted in quicker currents to his cheeks ; he tore the sacred fillet from his swelling forehead ; his eye-balls reddened, and a convulsive motion agitated all his features. At length, in a terrible voice, he exclaimed,

“ Odin claims the virgin for himself ! He dooms her to the purple flame of sacrifice if she weds not with Prince Guthrum. No other than a Prince, or a God, is worthy the possession of Gunilda !”

Conceive, O illustrious Alfred, the consternation of all who heard these words ; but, above the rest, paint to thyself the dreadful situation of Harold and Gunilda. The timid virgin sunk half fainting to the earth. Her lover, though nearly reduced to the same state, attempted to support her. “ Soul of my life !” cried he, embracing  
her,

her. “ does Odin—Oh, Gunilda! does Odin require our separation?”

“ Unhand the maiden,” cried the chief priest interfering; “ Knowest thou not that the victim of the Gods must not be polluted by the endearments of a mortal? And as yet the lips of the virgin have not declared her choice.”

The horror-struck Volugar hasted forward, fast as his feebleness would allow, and knelt beside the fainting Gunilda. “ Is Odin relentless?” cried he, with his hand uplifted to the priest in an attitude of supplication. “ Can no alternative—Will not vows and offerings suffice?”

“ I have uttered the decree of heaven,” replied the priest; “ Be it thy part to acquiesce in reverential silence. And now I call on the virgin to declare her choice.”

Gunilda half raised herself, and appeared about to speak. Volugar pressed her fondly to his bosom.—“ O, my child,” cried he, in accents of grief and tenderness, “ O, my child, my beloved! give some time to consideration. Delight of my aged eyes!—speak not yet.—Bethink thee of thy father. Who shall support his declining years if he loses thee?—Who shall administer comfort to his despairing heart, if thou desertest him?”

Gunilda appeared for a moment irresolute. She cast a glance at Harold, and that glance determined her. “ My father,” cried she, returning his embrace, “ were I to espouse Prince Guthrum, still wouldest thou have the loss of Gunilda to lament. O, my father!—thou wouldest not surely prefer for thy daughter a soul-consuming disease, a lingering death,—not less inevitable, though more slow, than that thou dreadest. “ No, my father,” she added, (a noble intrepidity illuminating

ing her countenance) “ thou wilt not remonstrate more. Thou wilt rather *support* thy Gunilda in the choice she is about to make. Hear that choice, O holy minister of Odin!—Make ready the instruments of sacrifice; thy victim is prepared!”

“ No, thou shalt not die! By heaven, I swear thou shalt not!” exclaimed Harold, impetuously.—“ Live Gunilda—live, even for Guthrum!—O torture!—Either way I lose thee.—Yet better, far better to see thee in the arms of my rival than—O horror!—No, my Gunilda.—No, thou shalt not die!”

“ Mistaken Harold,” replied Gunilda, faintly, “ far worse than death that fate to which thou wouldest consign me. Willingly, most willingly, I yield my bosom to the steel of sacrifice, since that is the only alternative that remains to save me from a lot more terrible;—from becoming the spouse of Guthrum!”

Oddune at this period judged it expedient to interrupt the narration of Ethelbert, as the shades of night approached. The curiosity of Alfred was wound to its highest pitch : he would willingly have journeyed on without thinking of rest or refreshment ; but the Earl of Devon, solicitous for his welfare, dissuaded him from his purpose, and they hastened to seek, in a rocky cave which appeared in view, that repose which their weariness had need of.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK

## BOOK II.

SCARCE did the first dawn of morn dispel the obscurity of night, when the travellers arose and pursued their journey. They had proceeded but a few paces, when Alfred, anxious to be relieved from the suspence he felt for the fate of Harold and Gunilda, urged Ethelbert to continue his narration. The youth made a respectful obeisance, and proceeded in the following words:

"Ivar, with an appearance of much compassion, besought the chief priest to consult the will of Odin again on the following day, and to omit no means of supplication or offering to reverse his decree.

despair of Harold, and the entreaties of the monarch, at length appeared to move him ; and he declared himself willing even to risque the anger of the God, which he said fresh importunity must excite.

Description can but faintly represent the situation of the disappointed lovers and the distracted father during that night. The morning concluded the torments of suspense, by bringing dreadful certainty. The chief priest declared the decree of Odin to be immutable, and threatened Denmark with unheard-of ills, if the will of that Deity were any longer resisted.

Impelled by a blind and furious zeal, the people, with one accord, surrounded the palace ; demanded that Gunilda should come forth, and by declaring her choice, deprecate the anger of the God.

“ O fanaticism,” exclaimed Alfred at this period, “ thou pest, and scourge of

the

the human race, how long shalt thou continue to impose on man with thy delusions?—When shall heaven-born reason regain the dominion which thou hast usurped?—When shall she dissipate the errors with which thou has enveloped humankind; when chase from their imaginations the idea of a being, which thou hast depicted as delighting in the miseries of man, thirsty of gore, and authorizing the commission of barbarous deeds, under the specious name of holy zeal—and display, by her clear and unerring light, the true attributes of divinity?"

Alfred ceased; he appeared for a few moments absorbed in thought, and then made a sign to Ethelbert to proceed.

## THE RELATION OF ETHELBERT CONTINUED.

“ GUNILDA presented herself to the multitude with an air of intrepidity. “ I am content,” cried she, in distinct and resolute accents, “ to be the victim of Odin, since he requires my immolation,— for I will not become the spouse of Guthrum.”

The beauty of her form, the fortitude with which she met the approach of death, for a few moments impressed her auditors with mingled pity and admiration, and a deep silence followed her words. But the clamours of superstition succeeded: they shouted loudly, applauded her obedience to the Gods, and demanded of the priest to fix the hour of sacrifice. He named the evening of the ensuing day, on which the festival of Odin chanced to fall, and they

they dispersed with redoubled shouts expressive of approbation.

The die was now cast ; Gunilda was given in charge to the priest ; and Harold denied the consolation of a last embrace, gave himself up to all the anguish of despair.

The dictates of nature conquered in Volugar the false courage of enthusiasm. He believed that Odin had required the sacrifice of his daughter : he believed that he should have submitted to that sentence, not only without repining, but with cheerfulness. But the feelings of the father were not to be restrained by superstition : he groaned from his inmost soul, he prostrated himself on the cold earth, and refused all consolation.

That night, urged by an impulse of frantic grief, Harold sought the grove of Odin. He rushed forward ; the dark  
gloom,

gloom, the death-like silence that reigned in these shades, suited his despair.

A sudden rustling among the trees made him turn his head. He beheld a person, clad in the habit of a scald, following him with hasty steps. “ Turn Harold,” he exclaimed, “ turn, and behold Wittigild, the debtor of thy clemency ! Behold him now ready to requite thy former kindness by a benefit above thy hopes.”

“ Talkest thou of hope ? ” exclaimed the son of Sitric, in a tone of deep despair. “ Knowest thou not that hope is for ever banished from the heart of Harold ? ”

“ I will recall it, generous chief,” replied Wittigild, “ thy Gunilda shall still live to bless thee.” “ Ha ! what say’st thou ? ” interrupted Harold, breathless with expectation.

“ The

"The priest of Odin," resumed Wittigild, "is in league with thy enemy, and mine. "He spoke not the dictates of inspiration.—The King suborned him."—  
"Great heaven!" exclaimed Harold,  
"Do I hear aright?—Hast thou proof?—  
Sport not with my despair."—"Most cer-  
tain proof," replied Wittigild, "and on  
the morrow will I, before the assembled  
chiefs, declare that proof.—Calm thy soul.  
Banish thy despair, and look forward to  
future years of connubial happiness."

The transports of Harold were too powerful for speech to express. He embraced Wittigild; in broken accents hailed him as his preserver; as the preserver of her, who was dearer to him than his own existence!

"No time is to be lost," cried Wittigild, interrupting his exclamations, "we must separate this moment.—Place an un-  
limited confidence in my words.—Inspire  
Volugar

Volugar and Sitric with the same. Assemble thy adherents : bring them armed to the grove of Odin on the hour appointed for the sacrifice ; and wait the result of my promise with the most lively hope, for thy hope shall not be disappointed."

At these words he rushed speedily away through an opening of the grove, and left Harold in suspense whether what had passed was only a vision of his distempered fancy, or a real circumstance. Soon, however, did he embrace that opinion which was most consonant to his wishes, and hastened to put in execution the instructions of Wittigild.

I pass over, illustrious Prince, the transition, which the intelligence of Harold caused in the bosom of Volugar, as thy own sensibility can better teach it thee than my description. Suffice it to say, that at the appointed hour the lover, the parent, and Sitric, repaired to the grove with beating

beating hearts, attended by a trusty band, composed of the companions of Harold and of Sitric, and the followers of Volugar.

The chief priest of Odin shortly appeared, leading Gunilda, arrayed in all the pomp of sacrifice. A robe of spotless white enveloped her lovely form, while her golden tresses were bound with a sacred fillet, and crowned with a chaplet of consecrated flowers. She advanced, with a composed and steady pace, her eyes fixed on the ground, as if she feared to trust them with the sight of her father and her lover.

The grove was filled with a numerous concourse of spectators, yet an universal silence reigned. No whispering sound was suffered to disturb the solemn stillness of the scene. The sun, though then in his meridian, glimmered but faintly through the umbrageous foliage of the trees : and this

this gloom, the deep silence, the sight of the victim, and the preparations for sacrifice, were sufficient to strike the boldest heart with terror. The fatal knife, destined to cut the vital thread of Gunilda, lay on the altar: on one side was a pyre of wood and combustible matter reared, and two attendants of the priest stood ready with lighted brands to enkindle the pyre, when the signal should be given.

Gunilda, and her conductor, now came forward to the altar. The latter knelt for a moment, then arose, took the knife in his hand, and muttering some mysterious words, placed it where it lay before. He now turned to the attendant scalds, and bade them commence the hymn of sacrifice.

“ King of men”—in strains of rude melody they began, “ King of men,” Odin, immortal and unchangeable. Sublime thou sittest in thy ætherial-hall, encompassed

compassed with the fullness of thy power; yet, at the call of thy favoured sons, the hardy warriors of the north, thou descendest; thou leadest them forward; thou givest victory to their banners, and markest out the happy souls destined to quaff with thee immortal pleasure in thy celestial mansion.

King of men, who shall describe the wonders of thy power? Thou speakest, and sudden the loud winds roar along the heath; the fire of heaven darts forth in blue flames, and the thunder in terrific peals bursts on the affrighted ears of trembling mortals. At thy nod the winds retire to their rocky caverns, the fire of heaven is extinguished, and the thunder hushed. Nature returns to her wonted calm, the fields wear a gayer verdure, the flowerets proudly display their variegated tincts, and the bright sun gilds the summits of the cloud-capt mountains.

King of men, favoured, thrice favoured  
is that happy mortal whom thou callest to  
thyself in holy sacrifice ! Blest is the virgin  
that bleeds on thy sacred altar ; swift shall  
her exulting soul, when freed from the  
cumbrous earth that now confines it, wing  
on light pinions to thy golden hall, and  
quaff with thee thy transcendant beverage  
of immortality. Soon, king of men, soon  
shall thy victim bleed. The consecrated  
steel already glitters in thy servant's hand—  
and now—”

At that moment, when the chief priest  
reared the terrible knife against the breast  
of Gunilda, the hymn and the horrid rites  
were interrupted. One of the officiating  
scalds rushed forward, and restrained the  
murderous hand.

It was Wittigild.—“ Cease !” cried he,  
with a loud and imposing voice, “ cease  
thy sacrilegious rites ! Odin requires not  
the sacrifice of Gunilda. Thou, unworthy  
minister

minister of the insulted Deity, thou hast profaned his name. Instigated by base motives, thou hast dared to pass the suggestions of malice and revenge for the inspiration of divinity!" "Valiant men," continued he, addressing the multitude, "behold me ready to unfold the plot of iniquity; do ye, if my words find credence, rescue innocence from the gripe of oppression, and inflict a just punishment on guilt."

The interruption of the ceremony, and the words of Wittigild, at first struck the assembly with consternation. They observed that the chief priest turned pale and trembled, as if conscious of the charge. Confused clamours broke from their lips. The King appearing to labour under the mixed influence of rage and shame, commanded the rites to go on. The clamours became louder, and an universal and threatening cry forbade compliance.

Harold

Harold and his trusty adherents now pressed forward to the altar. They surrounded the astonished Gunilda, and menaced the priest with instant death if he attempted to obey the order of the King, or to interrupt the disclosure of Wittigild. For a time the tumult and confusion that reigned in the grove rendered it impossible for his words to be heard, but at length the noise subsiding, he exalted his voice, and spoke to the following import :

“ Warriors of Scandinavia, ye whose generous souls start at a deed of baseness, how will you shudder, what just horror shall possess your breasts, when ye learn that the monarch of Denmark, led by partiality for his son, dictated to the minister of Odin that decree which he falsely pretended to be the impulse of inspiration. Noble chiefs, and you hardy warriors, will ye suffer Harold, the hero of Scandinavia, will ye suffer him to be bereaved of a prize which he has won by the  
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atchievement of the most generous and most valiant deeds?"

"Prove thy words," (cried they with one voice) and we hasten to rescue Gunilda, and inflict just vengeance on the traitorous priest!"

"Behold," cried Wittigild, throwing off the sacred mantle, part of which had covered his head, and disguised his features, "behold the brother of Saxo!—Him, who owes existence and virtue to the clemency and example of Harold!—When he so generously suffered me to depart unmolested from his presence, I sought a retreat unknown to any but a few of my adherents on whom I could most depend. Here I bewailed with just grief the fall of my hapless brother; and here, in process of time, I was informed of the contest between Harold and Guthrum, for the hand of Gunilda, and the approach of the decisive day, which was to terminate

nate this contest. Impelled by gratitude, I resolved to hie me to court, and there, if necessity required, to give my own testimony to the merit of my generous conqueror. I furnished myself with a disguise ; I came, and was a witness of Volugar's decision. I beheld the happiness of Harold, and the rage of Guthrum. Pleased at my benefactor's assured good fortune, and equally gratified that he, who had refused his daughter to Saxo, should see the dearest hopes of his son frustrated, I thought of returning to my retreat ; but this purpose was prevented. One of those persons, who officiate at the altar of Odin, had once been saved by my arm from a danger the most imminent. The eyes of gratitude are keen as those of revenge ; he discovered me, notwithstanding my disguise, and with friendly zeal reprehended the imprudence of my conduct.

I acquainted him with the cause. He started. "Thou imaginest then," said he,

he, "that the felicity of Harold is secure? Thou art deceived. At this moment dangerous machinations are forming against his peace. Yesterday, when the king dismissed the assembly, (in which he had appointed the time for Harold's nuptials) he repaired privately to the dwelling of the chief priest. By accident I overheard their conversation, and learned enough to convince me that some plot was contriving to frustrate the hopes of Harold, in which religion was to be converted into the prime instrument."

Burning with a just indignation at this intelligence, I entreated my informant to conceal me in the mansion of the priest, that I too might receive convincing proof of his treachery..

He complied. I soon received the proof I wanted. I heard the King dictate to this unworthy minister of the Gods, those deceitful words which he dared to

pronounce even at the sacred altar ! This day, O Scandinavians, confiding in the support of truth, I determined to disclose the imposture, and to effect my purpose, was provided by my informant with the sacred vestments."

In saying thus, Wittigild beckoned to one of the attendants. He stepped forward, and stood at his side. "Behold," resumed Wittigild, "behold the detectors of falsehood ! We swear by Odin himself, Odin, the avenger of deceit, that truth alone has guided this accusation!"

At these words the clamours of the assembly broke forth afresh. The tumults that agitated the multitude were manifested by the clashing of spears and shields, and the loud and dissonant cries which burst from their lips. The friends of the King and Guthrum exclaimed that the disclosure of Wittigild was false, and commanded that the decree of Odin should be obeyed ; but

but Harold and his adherents effectually preserved Gunilda. Menaces, noise, and confusion, universally prevailed ; at length the party of Harold, animated by their valiant leader, bore off the contested prize, and effected a fortunate retreat notwithstanding the resistance of Ivar and his friends.

When the first transports of mutual congratulation had subsided, consultation for the future took place, and they determined first to repair to the domains of Sitric, solemnize the nuptials of Harold and Gunilda, and then retreat into Norway, where the faithful tribe of Volugar would afford them new support.

The first resolve was executed. They arrived at the place of their destination, and Harold received from the hand of Volugar that invaluable prize, which had nearly been snatched from his hopes for ever.

Mean time the King released Guthrum from confinement, (where he had remained since that day in which he had treated Harold so injuriously) but he concealed from him the treachery he had acted, and aspersed Harold with the guilt of which he himself was conscious

The chief priest denied the charge of Wittigild, and interdicted Harold and his adherents, declaring them to be enemies to the Gods and men.

Where superstition has obtained dominion, the claims of gratitude and humanity are neglected. Those who had been most active in assisting the escape of Gunilda, now fancied themselves most obnoxious to the Gods ; they began to doubt the affirmation of Wittigild, which at first had been so implicitly believed, and to such a height were their terrors raised by the interdiction of the chief priest, that their doubts of Wittigild's truth were soon changed into a certainty

certainty of his falsehood. This idea having obtained a place in their imaginations, they could no longer consider Harold and Gunilda but as impious persons, who had defrauded the Deity of his just rights, and spurned at his decree.

While this disaffection spread rapidly, Guthrum penetrated into Norway, surprised the defenceless inhabitants of Volugar's domains, massacred them without mercy, set fire to his habitation, and laid waste his lands. When intelligence of these barbarous deeds reached the disaffected followers of Harold, they considered them as new proofs of Odin's vengeance, and no longer concealed their averseness to the cause in which they had embarked. Harold would have led them against the forces of Guthrum; they refused, and declared the motives which induced their refusal. No means of resistance now remained. The feebleness of Volugar's age proved unequal to the conflicts he had

F 3 experienced.

experienced. His health had decayed imperceptibly, but this last stroke was too powerful, and he sunk beneath it.

With his latest breath he besought Harold never to desert his Gunilda, but seek by a speedy flight to avert the fate that threatened both. In saying thus, he gave up his afflicted soul in the arms of his distracted daughter, who, in the frenzy of her grief, reproached herself with killing her parent, and would have madly flown to meet that fate which his dying injunctions had warned her to avoid.

When Harold had by his tender endearments soothed her into peace, he considered the present state of his fortunes. Sensible that his single courage would nought avail against a host of foes, though his noble soul could ill brook the idea of shameful flight, yet the danger of Gunilda reconciled him to all things. He communicated

municated to Sitric and Wittigild his intention, and the plan he had formed to effect it: then assembling his followers, after gently touching on their defection, he proposed that the present day (the last perhaps they might pass face to face) should be spent in convivial feasting.

The proposal was accepted. Night had scarce begun to veil the earth with obscurity, when the followers of Harold and of Sitric were plunged into a deep and deathlike slumber, the consequence of intoxication. The favourable moment was come: Harold embraced his beloved Gunnilda, and led her from his stately mansion, accompanied by his Sire, Wittigild, and four Norwegians, faithful followers of Volugar, who bore on their shoulders the necessaries required in their intended enterprize. The friendly moon arose, and guided them on their way. In a short time they arrived at a rocky inlet washed by the foaming waves, where a

bark, which had been constructed by the orders of Harold, was moored.

The moments were precious ; they hastily entered it ; and Harold, imploring the protection of the Gods, launched his simple vessel on the bosom of the deep. The sounding oars were now plied with alertness, and a favouring gale bore them speedily from the shore. The night passed off ; the grey morning dawned, and they exulted at the prospect of safety. But this flattering prospect soon vanished. Fierce winds arose : the jarring elements in desperate conflict roared. Now the foaming billows exalted the bark to an immeasurable height, now sunk with it into a frightful abyss. One moment borne forward by the violence of the tempest, the next driven to and fro without any certain course, the pilot's art became useless ; the rudder dropped from his feeble hand ; horror and desolation were present to his soul. The rest, pale, spiritless, aghast, waited

waited with the stupidity of fixed despair, that fate which appeared inevitable.

Harold alone still possessed himself. He collected all the firmness of his soul, spoke peace to the throbbing heart of Gunilda; with duteous exertions soothed the terrors of his Sire, and endeavoured to inspire Wittigild and his domestics with fortitude and confidence. But the grizly form of death (which in hideous colours presented itself to their terrified imaginations) took from his words all powers of persuasion. Fixed, immovable, all energy of soul was lost. Death, which their ideas represented as so terrible, they sought not to avert by any exertions of activity or prudence.

After raging for many hours with inconceivable fury, the war of the elements at length abated, and revived hope elated the souls of those who but now had resigned themselves to despondency.

The bark had been driven amongst an assemblage of rocks which jutted from the shore of Iceland. Far from that weak supineness they had lately felt, they now exerted every endeavour to guide it into a place of safety, and at length succeeded.

They landed in a wild and savage spot unmarked with human footsteps. The day was closing, and instead of exploring farther, they indulged themselves in that repose which their harassed spirits required, having first guarded against the assaults of wild beasts, (the only enemies they had to dread) by forming a necessary watch, who were relieved at intervals by those whom sleep had refreshed.

At the earliest dawn of morn, Harold and Wittigild, leaving Gunilda to the care of Sitric and the domestics, penetrated farther into the country. They beheld the majesty of solitary nature, they explored her recesses, and fearless entered a forest which

which had never bowed beneath the destroying hand of man. With much difficulty they penetrated through it, and at length came to an opening, which presented to their eyes the asylum of which they came in search. They beheld a valley not of wide extent, but possessing many advantages both of security and convenience. It was surrounded by lofty mountains, whose barren and uncouth summits invited not the eye of curiosity, or the step of avidity. “ See the asylum which heaven presents to our wishes !” cried Harold, in a tone of grateful transport. “ Peace and innocence will inhabit it, for it shall be the dwelling of Gunilda !”

He waited not but to mark the spot; again he and Wittigild turned to the forest, again penetrated through its shades, and soon reviewed the place where they had left their companions.

Next morning they all proceeded to the valley; and here the labours of Harold,

Wittigild, and their domestics, soon constructed a habitation, which possessed in convenience what it wanted in magnificence. They despoiled the bark of all it contained necessary to their use, and moored it in a place of safety.

Sustenance was their next care. The viands, with which the vessel had been stored, were nearly exhausted; but the unerring arrows of Harold still preserved their wonted force, and the timorous inhabitants of the air fell before them. The earth too, like a benevolent mother, nurtured in her bosom wholesome and palatable roots, whose properties the vigilant eye of necessity soon discovered. Large quantities of these were preserved, and laid up for their winter provision by Gunnilda, who added to the repository wild fruits which she had gathered in the forest, and dried in the beams of the sun.

Content and peace blest the inhabitants of the valley: needful labour and sweet  
repose

repose alternately divided their hours. The winter passed off: they had been sheltered from its inclemency; the spring revived the drooping powers of nature, and called them to new pleasures. Cultivation took the place of wildness, and the valley owed many charms to inventive art.

My birth, which happened at the conclusion of the first year of their residence in the valley, encreased the sphere of my parents' felicity. I was named Wittigild, in gratitude to him who had preserved Gunilda. Sitric felt his life renewed when he beheld me, and idolized me with all a grand-sire's fondness. Wittigild, the generous Wittigild, regarded me with the affection of a second parent, and attended my dawning reason with a solicitude equal to that of Harold and Gunilda.

My infant years passed in serenity and happiness. As my reason and my strength matured,

matured, my mind was formed to virtue by admonition and example, my body inured to hardihood by wholesome toil. Nor was I left deficient in those exercises, which add grace to activity, and adroitness to strength.

So shone the morning of my day. Alas! it was soon clouded, heavily clouded, and the mists of misfortune enveloped me!

I had attained my sixteenth year; I had lived unacquainted with sorrow, and I now experienced it in its fullest force. One day I attended my Sire and Wittigild in the chace. The weather was sultry: we were inflamed by a scorching thirst, and the fatigue we had undergone added to its influence. We sought a cooling stream: vain, for a long time, was our search. At length we discovered a spring gurgling from the earth. Eager to slake that thirst which tormented him, my Sire stooped and drank. O, fatal haste! The spring  
was

was nearly over-shaded with poisonous plants, whose leaves, steeped within it, had impregnated the water with their baleful qualities. The rage of thirst rendered my Sire heedless of the liquid's bitterness, but that satisfied, his recollection returned. He pushed Wittigild and myself from the fatal spring. "I have drank my death!" cried he aloud, "the water is poisoned!"

Oh heaven, too true were his words! The blood forsook his cheeks; a cold dew burst from his pores; his limbs shivered: he would have spoken, but agonies, excruciating agonies, interrupted his utterance. O King—my tears—they fall unbidden. But, my father—I witnessed his tortures.—I heard his groans. Deep, deep, did they penetrate to my heart!—And yet—even yet do I hear his broken accents, I hear them directed to me.—O day of woe! still art thou present. While life remains, never shall thy remembrance desert me!" He paused, and covering his

his face, gave vent to the grief that filled his soul.

Alfred suffered him to indulge it undisturbed; sensible that expostulation would rather irritate than repress a sorrow, which the alleviating hand of time had not been able to efface.

Ethelbert, thus left to himself, in a short time regained sufficient composure to resume his story; but as he was about to speak, Alfred interrupted him. "Youth," said he, "spare thyself the recital of what moves thee to such affliction; or, at the least, touch lightly on it, and hasten to the part which relates more wholly to thyself, for much and nearly am I interested for thee."

Ethelbert cast a glance of mingled reverence and gratitude at the monarch, bent his head, and resumed.

"I will take the privilege thy goodness allows me," said he, "and forbear to dwell on scenes of so much horror." Wittigild and I bore my expiring parent to his once happy dwelling. Gunilda beheld the husband of her heart struggling in the pangs of an horrid death. She beheld, and the sight bereaved her of all sense. Frenzy informed her motions. Her eyes shot the fire of distraction. She knew us not. She even knew not him, whose unhappy fate had reduced her to insanity.

Blest insensibility!—It spared her the last sad sounds that issued from the lips of Harold. It spared her seeing him, who had been wont to cheer her soul with his gaiety, who had soothed her pains by his endearments, extended a pale and inanimate corse, and committed to the cold bosom of the earth!

Thirty times had the beams of the setting sun gilded the turf which covered the remains

remains of my Sire, and still was the countenance of Gunilda unenlightened by her wonted reason. At length, however, she awoke, as from a long and deadly trance, and awoke to misery. But the natural rectitude of her soul soon gave her to reflect, that grief, though springing from a virtuous motive, when immoderately indulged, partakes the nature of vice. In as much as it concentrers all things in itself, feeds on its own sensations, and regards as importunate and tormenting the cares of humanity, and the complaints of distress. For deep and rooted affliction heeds not the common miseries of life, but feeling its own superiority of acuteness, regards all lesser evils as below consideration, and unworthy of sympathy or attention.

Gunilda, with a noble fortitude, struggled against the dominion of this selfish grief. Exertion procured victory, at least her solitary moments alone were given to the indulgence of sorrow, and these moments

ments were but few, for Sitric claimed all her care; the drooping Sitric, who, bowed down by years and affliction, was reduced to the feebleness of infancy.

Nor was her son neglected. She spoke of my Sire; she pointed out his virtues as an example for my life, and bade me shew my reverence for his memory by imitating his good qualities. One day as she instructed me thus in the presence of my grand-sire, he suddenly raised his head, and, with an appearance of more vigour of mind than he had a long time exerted, he pressed my hand tenderly, and exclaimed, “O thou dear and valued pledge of my lost son!—yet a few days, and I for ever quit thee. Come, therefore, and take advantage of my remaining moments. Come, and be informed that thou wert not born to waste thy prime in obscurity—that thy birth is noble—that thou art descended from a race, the foremost in valour, and all generous deeds—that an ample

ample patrimony, numerous adherents, should have been thy inheritance, and that injustice wrested them from thee with an unrelenting hand."

These words fired my young heart. I ran, I almost flew to throw myself at his feet. I embraced his knees, and, with youthful impetuosity exclaimed, "O ever honoured and reverend, tell, tell me all!—Was I born to this noble state?—O haste, give me the knowledge of what I ought to do, and fear not I will fail to perform it."

Scarce had the words passed my lips, when my mother cried, "alas! then I shall lose thee too, my only hope!"

I turned, and beheld her aspect shadowed with concern and dismay. But my grand-sire hastily replied, "and thou, Gunilda!—would'st thou for selfish gratification condemn this youth to languish in obscurity? Art thou not as I am, of

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Scandinavian origin? and should'st thou not consequently be the heir of generous thoughts? The hardy north is the nurse of heroes; her valorous sons disdain the flowery paths of ease and indolence.—Toil is their pastime, war their supreme delight."

Gunilda sighed, but still preserving the nobleness of her character, she arose, looked up to heaven, and exclaimed, "spirit of my love—if yet thou retainest a sense of mortal things, stoop from thy bliss a moment, and give ear! Endue my soul with fortitude. Chace from it all womanish fears, all weaknesses of my sex, and give me not only to resolve, but *act* as reason dictates!"

She now turned to Sitric. "Proceed," cried she, in a firm tone, "declare all thy experience has taught thee, and if thou failst in the narration, the friendly Wittigild and I will assist thee."

"Thou

"Thou art my daughter!" cried the old man, with an appearance of pleasure which had been long unusual to him—" thou art the true spouse of Harold, and thou wilt not disgrace his memory!"

He then commenced the detail, which I have already given thee illustrious Alfred. In fine, I was informed of all, and a new world burst on my imagination. I panted to enter society, to act deeds of valour, and to unite my name with renown. That ardour for novelty, natural to a spirit unexperienced and unbroken, and the love I bore my mother and Sitric (which pleaded most forcibly against the idea of quitting them) long struggled for pre-eminence; and my health at length yielded to the conflict.

The penetration of my mother soon discovered the source of my disease; and as the present evil is ever the most terrible, the loss of my health affected her more than

than the idea of my absence. She determined therefore to indulge a curiosity, of which the restraint might prove fatal to my life, and imparted her resolution to my grand-sire and Wittigild. The latter, with his wonted generosity of soul, offered to be my guide, and my protector. Gunilda accepted the offer with joy and gratitude, and soon acquainted me that the desire of my heart should be gratified, on condition I promised to return to Iceland at the conclusion of one year, whether prosperous or unfortunate.

This condition I most cheerfully acceded to, as it was what I myself would have chosen to fulfil. And now I looked forward with renovated hope to the summation of those wishes, which I had cherished even to the destruction of my tranquillity. It was determined that Wittigild and I should repair to Denmark; that he, whom seventeen years had worn from the remembrance of his former friends

friends or enemies, should pass for my father, and that we should profess ourselves willing to dispel the cloud with which the obscurity of our fortunes had surrounded us, by courting glory in the fields of danger.

Mean time we prepared for our departure with activity and speed. Wittigild, our domestics, and myself, constructed, with unceasing labour, the bark which was to waft us on our enterprize.

It was soon finished, and the day at length arrived, which was to bear me from my native vale, my living parent, and the ashes of my Sire.

Gunilda brought forth the falchion and the arrows of my father, with that scarf, which she had once given him as the pledge of love.

Notwithstanding all her fortitude, at that moment the remembrance of former times

filled her eyes with tears. She looked at the scarf, she pressed it to her lips, and bedewed it with a gush of sorrow. "Precious ornament", she cried, "precious token of my love, my spouse, my Harold!" She paused, recovered an appearance of composure, and put the scarf in my hands.

"My son," she resumed, "preserve this memorial of thy parents with care and secrecy; if years have weakened the fero-cious passions of Guthrum, if reason has enlightened thy countrymen, and chaced from them the delusions of superstition, then mayest thou declare the secret of thy birth, and this well known texture shall give credence to thy words. But if the fell passions of Guthrum still burn with wonted vigour, and superstition still maintains her baleful dominion, take heed how thou declarest thyself to be the son of Harold and Gunilda. For then shalt thou incur the penalty which a mistaken zeal would have inflicted on thy parents; and thou wilt

die unpitied and unlamented, stigmatized as abhorrent to men, and hateful to the Gods. Yet should thy reception be favourable, (and, O may the fond presage of my soul be accomplished!) discover not this retreat. Here let me still remain unmolested by the machinations of enemies, or the solicitation of friends. Alas! this little vale is my world, and that spot which contains the ashes of my Harold, is the center of my thoughts. They wander not my son—they wander not but for thee. Return therefore—O, stay of my widowed soul! And though fortune should refuse to crown thee with her gifts, bring back what heaven and thy parents care have given thee, an *undaunted* spirit and an *uncorrupted* heart."

So saying, she pressed me fervently to her bosom, and besought the blessings of the Gods upon my head.

Sitric, with fond affection, strained me in his arms, and gave Wittigild many charges

charges for my safety. My heart melted within me ; I shed a flood of tears, I even hesitated whether I should pursue my purpose ; but at that moment Wittigild buckled the falchion of Harold to my side, and put his arrows in my hand. At sight of these memorials of valour, and of heroism, I felt my spirit roused ; new fortitude possessed me, and after once more embracing those I held so dear, I entered the bark ; Wittigild followed my steps, and we committed ourselves to the bosom of the waters.

Fortune seemed to smile on our enterprise : our voyage was prosperous and speedy. At length we reached the shore of Denmark ; that shore which my eyes had ached to see, and my heart bounded at approaching. We disembarked ; I kissed the natal soil of my fathers, and felt my breast expand with new and delightful emotions. In fine, we loitered not, but hasted to the residence of the

monarch. That splendor, in which my more experienced reason sees nought but of barbarous and uncouth, I then considered as the perfection of magnificence. I saw the spoils of ravaged nations, the acquirements of blood and toil lavished in rude luxury. All was riot and confusion; the banquets of revelry were succeeded by the tumults of war. Noisy festivity this moment filled the air with bursts of merriment; the next the blood of kinsmen and of friends defiled the festal board: the roofs resounded with the wailings of helplessness, and the hoarse roarings of revenge.

The quiet and sobriety in which I had been nurtured, rendered me at first disgusted with these wild and licentious manners. But habitude soon reconciled me to them, or at the least I regarded them with indifference, the most dangerous state into which the mind can fall. Wittigild, to whom a superiority of years and experience

perience had given wisdom, preserved me from the snares in which my facility might have plunged me by unceasing vigilance and care.

Guthrum, and two of his brothers, named Oscitel and Amund, had gone on an expedition to England some time before our arrival in Denmark.

Wittigild (who had stained his countenance with dusky herbs for a more sure concealment) introduced himself to the King and Fritigern, as a fugitive from Sweden, who claimed employment for himself and me amongst the warlike tribes of Denmark.

We were received with courtesy and favour, and promised, that in the next enterprize of Guthrum, we should bear a distinguished part.

The veteran warriors, who had been contemporaries of Harold, often traced in my features the resemblance I bore to that unfortunate chief; yet they traced it without suspicion of the affinity that connected us, and I eluded discovery by the cautious deportment in which I had been instructed by Wittigild.

Discovery I now, indeed, perceived must teem with danger. A few spoke of Harold with pity and regret, but the multitude detested what they falsely imagined his impiety. His union with Gunilda was regarded as a crime which called for the unceasing vengeance of the celestial powers, and the name of Wittigild was never mentioned without horror. Superstition had even fabricated a tale, which was universally believed, that in flying from the power of Guthrum, my parents and their companions had been precipitated by Odin's hand into the profound abyss. This tale was to me a security from danger, yet I

secretly

secretly repined at the hard necessity which obliged me to appear as a fugitive, where Nature had given me a title to the most exalted rank.

Guthrum at length arrived, and the keen eye of revenge was not to be deceived. The King presented me to him as the companion of his future toils.

He started back with abhorrence. "Harold, my enemy yet lives!" cried he aloud. "This youth received the light in Sweden," replied Ivar. "No," returned Guthrum, fiercely, "he is not of Swedish origin! His veins are filled with Danish blood—the blood of Harold!—and my enemies yet live to insult me and the offended Gods!" The King now spoke again. "What illusion disturbs thy senses?" cried he, "the father of this youth is present here, and not as thy distempered fancy would conclude. See, he approaches;

proaches; let his sight banish the error that clouds thy imagination."

During this discourse I was agitated with mingled anger and confusion. Wittigild was no less disturbed than myself. His disturbance sprung at once from his fears of discovery; and the hatred he bore Guthrum and the King, which was as lively and as strong as that of the former for Harold, for the wrongs of Saxo were yet present to his memory.

He advanced to Guthrum, who eyed him with a look of furious scrutiny; yet his penetration was baffled, and though the confusion of Wittigild was manifest, he could recall no knowledge of his person. For me, scorning the arts of dissimulation, I maintained a strict silence, choosing rather to risque the utmost rigour of punishment, than to ensure security by an absolute falsehood.

"I know thee not," cried Guthrum, with discontent; "but this stripling is doubtless the son of Harold, and as such the inheritor of his Sire's baseness, and the abhorred of my soul! His air, his features, his stature, are the same. Deceit, the *deceit* of his *Sire*, sits in the form of mildness on his brow! Yes, he is the son of Harold. Odin has discovered his victim, and demands his immolation!"

Just anger loosed my tongue, and I was about to speak, when Wittigild, giving me a look, which implied a command of forbearance, replied himself to the words of Guthrum.

"Weak," said he, "is the plea by which thou wouldst prove this youth the son of Harold. That chief, as report asserts, and probability confirms, has long since fallen a sacrifice to the severity of his fate. Why then, O Prince, wouldst thou, with ungovernable rage, rake the

ashes of the dead for a resemblance, which haply exists only in thy own imagination? If this be the son of Harold, where has he lived, who has sustained his infancy? Who has formed his mind to virtue, and his body to the exertions of valour? Were he the inheritor of heaven's enmity, would heaven favour him with these endowments? Were he the son of Harold, would he risque the fell effusions of thy rage, which survives the grave, and wages war with corruption? And why, O Prince, why would'st thou wrest from me the name of father for an accidental resemblance; a resemblance which perhaps to thee alone is strong? A sport of nature thou would'st convert into certain proof!—Not certain, but fallacious are such proofs, and unworthy is it of Prince Guthrum's fame and rank to seek aids like these to his resentment, and bereave a tender parent of his son."

He ceased, and examined the countenances of his auditors, to discover the

effect of his discourse. Guthrum, far from appearing to have his doubts removed, maintained an aspect of gloomy incredulity; but the King, and the chiefs assembled round him, seemed to entertain contrary sentiments: and they appeared to wait only my confirmation of the words of Wittigild, to give him all the credence he desired.

Yet still I spoke not, for still was falsehood hateful to my soul. Wittigild encouraged me to speak by looks and gestures, but without effect, and I continued silent and confused.

Notwithstanding this suspicious embarrassment, pity for my youth, led the assembly to hope that I was what I appeared, and hope, by a quick and natural transition, became belief. No person doubted now, but Guthrum, who, guided by lynx-eyed hatred, discovered, at every new glance, fresh matter to confirm his suspicions.

Yet, finding that even the King thought those suspicions injurious, he ceased to avow them, and my fate yet rested in suspense.

But though they were not declared, they appeared hourly to gain farther strength; and, notwithstanding I sought to conciliate his esteem by every act which was not derogatory to the memory of my Sire, his aversion to my sight and conversation appeared rather to augment than diminish.

At length the fleet was in readiness for a new invasion, and we prepared to depart. I now found that the promise I had made my mother could not be fulfilled, for my movements were watched with such solicitude, by the emissaries of Guthrum, that I could not venture on a step of so much magnitude, without incurring the danger she had warned me to avoid. Yet the idea of what she must feel, at the disappoint-

appointment of her hopes, when the time destined for my return should arrive, tormented me without cessation.

I imparted my thoughts to Wittigild ; he participated in my emotions, and undertook himself to relieve her anxiety : for which purpose we concerted, that at the moment of embarkation he should feign to be seized with a violent disease, which must necessarily oblige him to remain in Denmark, instead of partaking in the destined enterprize ; and then, when the vigilant eye of Guthrum was withdrawn, it was easy to elude the suspicions of those who remained. The time of our departure came. Our stratagem was put in execution, and had the desired effect. Wittigild lamented with apparent sorrow the disappointment of his hopes, and commanded me to support not only my own character, but his, by the exertions of valour and good conduct. We took leave with unfeigned reluctance, and the mutual affection

affection we testified was to all unprejudiced spectators a sure proof of the affinity we pretended.

During our voyage I had occasion to render a service to Guthrum, which in some measure softened the usual disgust and horror with which he beheld me.

One day, as he stood on the edge of the bark which he commanded, giving some directions to the pilot, his foot slipped ; he fell, and the raging waves surrounded him.

I was a spectator of the accident, and instantly plunged into the sea, I combated with the fury of the element, caught his garments, and held him above water till we were both taken on board the bark. The sudden shock he had received prevented him some time from knowing who had been his deliverer ; but when he attained this knowledge, vexation appeared to

to struggle with gratitude : yet the natural generosity of his soul, which could not be wholly subdued by ferocity, at length prevailed : he thanked me, but his thanks were constrained.

We proceeded on our voyage : we reached England, and then were my eyes first made acquainted with the devastations of cruel war, and my hands inured to spoil and rapine.

Long, O King, did we smart beneath thy valour, and often were our designs subverted by thy prudence ; in so much, that at length the leaders of our forces began to fear they should never be able to attain a permanent settlement in England, which was the prime object of their hopes.

Actuated by these fears, they determined to gain from thee, if possible, what had so often been exacted from thy predecessors,  
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a contribution of treasure, which might compensate for the disappointment of that hope they had entertained, and now despaired of gratifying.

A new defeat, which they sustained from thy victorious arm, was a spur to the immediate execution of the scheme they had formed. An embassy was dispatched to thee, and I mingled with the train, anxious to behold the splendour of the British court, and its brightest ornament—a monarch so justly renowned for all kingly virtues and endowments.

I saw thee, and found that fame had not exaggerated thy perfections. That greatness of soul, which displayed itself in thy looks and actions, attracted all my admiration ; and this was encreased to the highest esteem when I heard thy noble and magnanimous reply to the requisition of my countrymen. When I saw thy eyes sparkle with indignation—when I heard  
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the firm accents of thy lips. "Go,"— thou didst say, "go, bear to the leaders of Denmark the reply of Alfred. Give them to know that pusillanimity is a stranger to his soul. That he will never exhaust the property of his subjects to purchase a precarious peace, by satisfying the claims of rapacious invasion! No—to heaven, to his own valour, and the affection of his people will he trust for security!"

Prince, these words sunk deep into my soul. I regarded thee, who uttered them, as the first of men, and of heroes. Notwithstanding the hostile blood that flowed in my veins, I could not refrain from secretly wishing that thou mightest counteract the exertions of thy foes, and preserve thyself and thy country. At that moment I swore to myself that I would soften, if possible, the fate of such of thy subjects as should be taken captive by the Danes; and, as far as my power extended,

I per-

I performed that oath with scrupulous exactness.

New succours poured to us from Denmark, and the late fears of our leaders were at an end. They pursued the advantages that their numbers gave them. Then it was, that a panick terror possessed thy subjects, and made them cowardly desert from freedom, and from thee. Our leaders, enraged at thy firm opposition, which had so long delayed their conquests, determined to make thee feel all the cruelty which lawless power and fury could inflict. I shuddered at their denunciations of vengeance. I offered supplications to heaven for thy safety. My prayer was answered ; thy prudence eased me of apprehension, and our chiefs, stung with disappointment, and increased rage at thy concealment, offered magnificent rewards to the daring hand which should either bereave thee of life, or deliver thee to captivity.

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Mean time they possessed themselves of thy palace : they rioted in thy spoils, and the spoils of thy people ; and they thought now of possessing nothing less than the entire sovereignty of England. To effect this they divided, and in different bodies spread themselves over the kingdom, bringing terror and desolation wheresoever they advanced.

I remained in the camp of Guthrum and Oscitel, who maintained a numerous body of forces in the heart of the country. One day a party of our soldiers surprized a rich monastery of nuns, and bore off its wealth and its inhabitants to the camp. The unhappy virgins were divided amongst the most illustrious of our chiefs, and one, of superior beauty, Oscitel reserved for himself. All the horrors of the fate which seemed to await her struck this lovely maiden. She appeared overwhelmed with despair ; she called repeatedly for death, and uttered such moving lamentations, that  
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the souls of the spectators, though steeled by a long course of violence and rapine, were touched with a sympathetic concern.

Guthrum raised her from the earth, and assured her, on a warrior's faith, that she should suffer neither insult or defilement; but that Oscitel should alone owe her favour to mildness, solicitation, and perseverance.

In saying thus, he culled three virgins from amongst the captives; and gave them to her for attendants, commanding that she should be treated with all the respect and observance which the tumults and hurry of the war would allow.

The beauteous maiden prostrated herself at his feet, and poured forth the effusions of her gratitude in accents that were melody itself. When he enquired concerning her birth, she answered, with a rosy blush, which added new graces to her

her countenance, that it was not mean ; but besought him to join forbearance of that question to the benefits he had already conferred upon her.

Such fascination was there in her accents, that the haughty soul of Guthrum melted into compliance ; and he forbore to importune her by further solicitation.

I witnessed this scene with unspeakable emotion. Never before had I beheld such beauty, such modesty, such grace united in one form.

The glances of her dark and sparkling eyes shot into my soul ; and I gazed on her love-inspiring countenance with such a fixed regard, as if each look was the last I expected to obtain.

From this moment I was totally changed ; all my wishes, all my thoughts, were concentered in Birtha, for by that appellation was she known.

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The desire of pleasing her whom I loved, was the sentiment which animated all my actions, and at length recommended me to her notice. She observed me with more complacency than the rest of my countrymen; nay, I soon became so rooted in her favour, that she permitted me to be the companion of her retired hours, when, with no other auditors than her women and myself, she was accustomed to pour forth the grief of her soul for the miseries of her country.

Often, illustrious Alfred, did she speak of thee: often enumerate thy virtues, and deplore thy fate with a more than common energy of sorrow. At such moments my heart knew the pangs of jealousy, and once, unable to restrain myself, I ventured to hint, that captivity was not the greatest of her ills; but that in lamenting her lost freedom, she lamented also the deprivation of a favoured lover.

No sooner had I spoken these words than I repented my temerity. Her reply banished my disturbance.

"Thou art inistaken youth," she answered, (in accents unmixed with resentment;) "true, I feel that affection for Alfred which the father of his country deserves; but in mourning his loss, I mourn not the destruction of my tenderest hopes. It was impossible that Alfred could be *my* lover, or I his mistress; but he was my king, my friend, and my protector. And as such, I shall continue to bewail him without cessation or restraint."

I now excused my temerity, and was made happy by an assurance that I had not incurred her resentment.

While thus I drank in the delicious poison of love without seeking to counteract its effects, Guthrum was alarmed by a report, that the brave Oddune was advancing

advancing at the head of a resolute body of forces.

The idea that the spirit of the English was entirely broken had gained such ground, that this report, though at first received as certain, was soon contemned as false; and the Danes gave themselves up to the supineness of fancied security.

Oscitel mean time used those endeavours which the will of Guthrum had permitted to gain the affections of Birtha; but that lovely maid was still inflexible to his suit, and the pleasure which she appeared to experience in my conversation, inflamed him with jealous rage.

One day he reproached her with this partiality, and represented me in terms of much scorn, as unworthy to possess it. He spoke of the obscurity of my birth and fortunes; asserted that some actions, which shunned the light, must have driven

me

me and my Sire, fugitives from our own country, to seek protection in his; and in fine, blackened my character by all the dark hints and obscure surmises which malice could suggest.

" And canst thou," he added, reddening with passion as he spoke, " canst thou prefer this low born stripling of questionable fame to Oscitel, the son of a mighty monarch?—Who, by the renown of his actions, has added new splendor to his birth; and who is content to offer to thy acceptance a hand, which the noblest Dames of Denmark would rejoice to gain!"

Birtha regarded him with a disdainful aspect. " Thy renown," cried she, " has originated in the misfortunes of my bleeding country. Thinkest thou then that it can either engage my esteem, or attract my affection? And for thy birth, my own is not so mean, that I should *seek to hide*

*its obscurity* by an union with Oscitel? Pardon me, therefore, if I am not studious to acquire the gift thou offerest me, or willing to accept it."

At these words she refused to hold any further converse, and Oscitel (sensible that Guthrum held his promise to prevent force sacred, a method himself would have willingly employed) was obliged, by the dread of his brother's resentment, to controul his own, or at the least to avoid its avowal.

On my next interview with Birtha I was struck with astonishment, and afflicted with despair at the coldness and severity of her deportment. Unable to bear in silence the torments which this change inflicted, I threw myself at her feet, and besought her to tell me in what I had offended.

Won by the earnestness of my supplications, she softened, at length, and acquainted me with the charge of Oscitel.

Thrown off my guard, I impetuously pulled from my bosom the scarf with which my mother had intrusted me ; and, putting it in her hand, exclaimed in a voice rendered hoarse by the violence of passion,

“ Bear this token to Oscitel, and ask if the son of him, who was wont to wear it, is not nobly born as himself !”

My rival entered as I spoke. I advanced towards him, and at the same moment Birtha displayed the scarf, and, with an air of triumph, repeated the words I had uttered in the tumult and madness of my anger. Innocent maid ! she knew not that these imprudent words might hasten my destruction.

The scarf was well known, and Oscitel instantly recollected it. He snatched it eagerly from her hand, and exclaimed in an accent of transport, “blest discovery! Odin vindicates his offended laws! The son of Harold is my rival! Maid, I thank thee for thy intimation, and *fear not* that Guthrum *shall remain ignorant of thy lover's rank.*”

The cruel joy that sparkled in his eyes, the air of insolent triumph with which he rushed away, filled Birtha with anxiety and dismay. Her disturbance was augmented by my looks, for at that moment reason operated, and I felt all the imprudence of which I had been guilty. I thought of my mother. The promises which her tender love had exacted, were falsified by the tumults of outrageous anger. Never more could I hope to revisit her; to cheer her with the sight of her only remaining consolation. I could not even expect that she might remain ignorant of the terrible fate

fate which must put a period to my existence ; for Wittigild, the friendly Wittigild, would not fail to seek me out, and I had the additional aggravation to my horrors of thinking that search must render him liable to partake the fatal lot that awaited me. I had undone myself, I had undone my parent, and my friend—and she whom I considered as dearer to me than light or life, she too would be left a prey to the cruelty of the spoiler !

These reflections agonized my soul. I was unable to speak ; to answer the tender and anxious inquiries of Birtha, who repeatedly asked what terrible mystery was annexed to the discovery I had made.

While yet she questioned, and while yet I listened without the power of reply, Guthrum and Oscitel appeared. The former addressed me in a firm tone.

“ My suspicions were just,” said he, “ and thou art the son of Harold. Were

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that knowledge general, thy death would be required by the ministers of Odin. Some time since I would have delivered thee to their power; but thou hast saved me from imminent danger, and though the son of Harold was the last I could have wished for my preserver, yet he was my preserver. Honour, therefore, forbids me to revenge on his head the injuries which were committed by his parents. Thou art safe youth. Oscitel is alone master of thy secret, and he has promised not to divulge it. But keep thee from my sight, for still can I not regard the son of Harold with complaisance or affection."

These words restored me to new life; I returned my acknowledgments to him, who uttered them, and bade him recollect, that as I was the son of Harold, I was also the son of Gunilda, of her whom once he loved.

" Touch

"Touch not on that subject," said he, frowning, "content thee with my forbearance, and seek to gain no more."

So saying, he quitted the apartment abruptly, and motioned to Oscitel to pursue his steps. The countenance of that Prince manifested him ill satisfied with the discourse of Guthrum; but he obeyed his motion, and followed him in a morose and sullen silence. Left alone now with Birtha, I displayed all the emotions of my soul; and she was soon made acquainted with the most eventful circumstances of my parents' story, and my own. The communication drew soft sorrow from her beauteous eyes. She shuddered at the recital of those woes which superstition had caused, and bade me quit a faith which authorized cruelty and crimes, under the specious name of piety; and seek in her religion which only could insure them peace, virtue, and salvation.

Her words penetrated my inmost soul. I required her to instruct me in tenets which promised so much happiness. She traced the outlines of this heavenly doctrine, and engaged to give me further instruction from time to time. I was charmed, my understanding expanded: my benighted soul was enlightened by the emanations of true reason.

The certain approach of Earl Oddune too soon took from me the power of attending to my fair instructress; yet, with a jealous care, I cherished the little I had learned, and the gloomy worship of Odin became every day more detestable to my heart.

Oscitel and Amund advanced to meet Oddune, with the troops under their immediate command, while Guthrum continued in the camp; for the trifling numbers of the English induced him to believe that no greater force was necessary to subdue

due them. I accompanied the warriors who sought the English, and we soon came to an engagement. I am led to conclude from subsequent events, that Oscitel, by studied misconduct, produced our defeat; it is certain he exerted neither valour nor prudence in the conflict. We were consequently routed with great slaughter, and forced to shelter ourselves in the camp from the fury of our pursuers.

The shame that had attended our arms, affected Guthrum with the most violent transports of unruly anger; and the ties of affinity were scarcely sufficient to preserve Oscitel and Amund from his rage.

Eager to repair the evil that had happened, he designed to lead his forces in person against Oddune at the earliest dawn of the ensuing morn, and gave what directions were necessary for accomplishing his purpose.

The morning arrived, and he came forth; but what was his surprize, when he perceived that the soldiers, far from manifesting any ardour for the engagement, appeared inclined rather to avoid than seek the enemy, and at length, with mutinous clamours, refused to march under his command.

Guthrum indignantly asked why they objected to his leading them. Oscitel stepped forward, and answered, “The Gods,” cried he, “are offended.—Our late defeat evinces their indignation.—Odin no longer deigns to lead his once favoured sons. Guthrum, thou must appease him before these warriors take the field. “In the son of Harold,” continued he, pointing to me, “behold the victim that Odin claims! The son of Harold and Gunilda is answerable for the crime of his parents, and his blood must wash away the defilement with which his society

society has infected us. Then shall we go forth to battle, conscious of Odin's protection!—Then shall we obliterate the memory of our late disgrace!"

The assembled chiefs and soldiers testified their approbation of this speech by clashing their spears, and calling unanimously for my instant immolation.

The pride of Guthrum, which had been the primary source of his enmity to my Sire, now actuated him to espouse my cause. I was alone, defenceless, exposed to the attacks of my enemies.—I had saved his life; he had promised to preserve mine.—Led by these considerations, he attempted to conquer them by the arts of persuasion: but those arts, unusual to him, and mixed with his wonted sternness, failed to effect what he desired. On the contrary, their clamours increased, and at length they menaced to force that com-

pliance which their requests could not procure.

Guthrum now saw his authority on the point of being lost. A sudden thought struck him ; he raised his voice, and addressed them as follows :

“ Thou Oscitel dost assert that this youth is answerable for the crime of his parents ; and you soldiers claim his instant death. I am willing to grant your claims, provided this youth refuses to declare what retreat conceals his parents from the wrath of Odin. But, on condition he discovers them who were the true perpetrators of that deed, which incurred the anger of the Gods, ye will not be so unjust as to make him suffer for a crime which he did not commit, and by so doing allow those who deserve punishment to escape it.”

He paused, and a general murmur of assent pervaded the ranks. He turned to me,

me, and repeated the alternative of my life or death.

Then it was, that I no longer regarded the horrors which surrounded me. I felt my soul raised to the power of extraordinary exertion, and I spoke its dictates.

"Harold," cried I aloud, "exists no longer. Cold is the grave in which he lies, and green the turf that covers him! But Gunilda yet lives, and never shall the lips of her son utter what would betray her to the power of barbarity. No—harmless, and undisturbed may the current of her life glide on till that moment in which the author of Nature shall think fit to rejoin her to her spouse!—Calm be her departure!—May no rumour of Wittigild's fate ruffle her tranquillity! And now, O gloomy Odin, be glutted with my torments.—O Deity, if, indeed, thou hast a being unworthy of worship or veneration!"

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These words appeared to inspire universal indignation. "Lead the blasphemer to instant death!" cried Oscitel aloud; and at the same moment some men advanced to bind me. The spirit of Harold animated my soul: I drew my falchion, and exclaimed. "No, I will not tamely yield my breath to the claims of a horrid superstition!—If death awaits me, I will not die alone!"

Oscitel fiercely approached, and felt the effects of my despair. I wounded him in the hand, and was going to repeat the blow, when I was seized behind, and disarmed.

My fate now appeared inevitable; and, though I will not pretend that I beheld the end of existence approach without some pangs; yet my indignation against Oscitel, he who had so basely betrayed me, he, who now exulted openly at my destruction,

destruction, gave me a temporary semblance of fortitude.

Guthrum no longer attempted to prevent my imnolation. The respite he had obtained for me, could be prolonged no more, as I had refused the alternative he offered ; and the wound I had given Oscitel cancelled in his mind the debt of gratitude he owed me.

I was borne from the camp to a vale encircled with woods. I saw the horrid preparations begin, and I involuntarily shuddered.

The enchanted standard was reared over a temporary altar, which they had in haste erected. The scalds advanced. They sung the praises of Odin ; they celebrated his power, and the unerring force of his decrees. Then changing their voices to notes hoarse and dissonant, they uttered horrid imprecations against my parents, and

and myself: and turning to the figure of the jetty Raven, which skilful art had interwoven in the standard, called on him as the messenger of Odin to attest their words.

While yet they prolonged their strains, the rites were suddenly interrupted. A large band of armed men burst from the woods, and assailed my enemies with fury, They proved to be the followers of Oddune, and their chief himself commanded them. The superstitious dread, which the gloomy ceremonies had inspired, added to the suddenness of the attack, took from the Danes all powers of rational resistance. Wild rout and disorder ensued; a few of the chiefs attempted to restore order, and infuse courage; but their efforts were vain. The multitude perceived no safety but in speedy flight, and with one accord, they betook themselves to the camp; whither Oddune did not think fit to pursue them, as he was sensible of the inferiority of his forces

forces to those of Guthrum, if opposed in regular conflict.

I was now soon delivered from my bonds; and the English, impelled by religious zeal, quickly destroyed the altar, and erased every vestige of that pile which superstition had erected.

This was but the work of a few moments: their prudent chief then led them from the vale to their former covert of the woods.

Oddune, though anxious to learn what motive had induced the Danes to butcher their countryman, was prevented by the exigencies of the time from hearing more than a few outlines of my story. These, though scanty, were sufficient to excite his sympathy, and interest his compassion. He desired me to forget that Denmark had given me birth; to look on his country as my own, and to become a Christian, and

and his brother. This proposal agreed with the most predominant wish of my heart. I had suffered too much from the barbarous worship of blindness and superstition to feel any predilection for its cause; instantly, therefore, did I assent to his offered kindness, and express the gratitude with which my soul was filled.

He now disposed his forces for a speedy retreat from the woods, which could no longer afford concealment; and ordered some persons, in whom he could confide, to disperse themselves amongst the dispirited English, awaken their courage, and invite them to his assistance. Some less pusillanimous than the rest joined him with speed and secrecy, but these were few, and their assistance could afford him no hope of conquest. He, therefore, determined to return to his own earldom, which his absence had left undefended, yet not till he had sought with care where thou wert secreted. By the exertion of speed,  
activity,

activity, and discipline, he avoided the pursuit of Guthrum, and at length gained that spot which, at the cottage of Edwin, he described to thee. After bestowing some additions to its natural security, he quitted it in order to begin his search, taking only a few followers and myself, disguised in this habit, to bear him company. Thou art already acquainted, illustrious Prince, with what befel us till our interview with thee."

The youth ceased to speak at these words, and Alfred, strongly affected by the events of his story, became still more inclined to serve him than before.

These events furnished sufficient matter for conversation during the remainder of their journey, which in two days more was concluded by their arrival at the place of their destination.

The

The followers of Oddune received their chief with many demonstrations of joy. Alfred still desired to be concealed, and this was with facility effected, as amongst the adherents of the Earl of Devon there was not one who had a certain knowledge of his person. A few had seen him transitorily, but they had only seen him on a throne, and his present disguise effectually concealed him from those. He was introduced to them by Oddune as a chief of illustrious birth, and the Earl desired them to respect him equally with himself. To command more would have been to incur suspicion of his real rank. Alfred had instructed Oddune in this deportment;untainted with that weak pride which debases the dignity it would preserve, he regretted not the deprivation of a frivolous gratification, which could neither be productive of any advantage to his cause, or administer any real consolation to his heart. — That heart, noble and liberal, admitted no idea of self.

The

The miseries of England, and the wish to alleviate those miseries, engrossed it wholly. Yet was it not unused to tender emotions; once had it felt them even to the deprivation of its peace. But a delicacy unexampled had then suppressed them, and now the cares of a father and a King nearly finished the conquest that honour had begun.

Alfred examined the strength of his present asylum, and determined to render it yet more secure. The plans he formed he disdained not to assist in executing. Oddune beheld a new spectacle, and the sight penetrated his heart. He beheld the *first of men* performing the offices of the *meanest*. He saw him who had been nurtured in the softness and delicacy of a court, engage with alacrity and cheerfulness in the most toilsome and laborious exertions. “O virtue,” said he to himself, “how sweet, and how alluring art thou

thou in theory; but how noble, how affecting, how irresistible in practice!

Ethelbert was yet more sensibly affected, and he sought to render himself worthy of Alfred's society, by imitating the example he admired. While working by the side of Alfred all other ideas were absent from his mind; but, in the moments when his body was at rest, when no employment required his attention, and no labour called him from himself, the emotions of his soul were acute, afflicting, and unrestrained.

Meantime the fortifications were carried on without cessation. And Alfred denominated his new asylum Æthelingey, or the Isle of Nobles. It was indeed the residence of genuine nobleness it being the residence of Alfred.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK

## BOOK III.

DURING the progress of the works the King had frequently detached small parties of the followers of Oddune to forage for their common support, and these excursions provided for their sustenance during the winter, at the conclusion of which the strength of the place was fully secured. The time of action now arrived. He led forth his little band, and by well-concerted and vigorous sallies diffused consternation among the Danes, who felt the terror of his arm, yet were ignorant from whence the blow proceeded.

But nothing decisive could yet take place ; he knew not whether his people were willing to shake off the yoke that oppressed them, and therefore to discover himself to them was still hazardous.

Oddune

Oddune too, the brave and faithful Oddune, was compelled to hasten to his own estates, which were menaced with the devastations of the foe. He had learned that Hubba, the Dane, hovered near the coast of Devon with his fleet, after having lately made Wales the scene of blood and carnage.

Not a moment was to be lost; he took leave of the King and Ethelbert, and sate off through unfrequented paths, known only to himself, attended by a few followers. The greater part still continued under the command of Alfred, to whom the Earl at parting spoke these words.

“ My King, I will return to thee victorious, or I will return no more!—Should the presage of my soul be accomplished, my success will be a signal for thine.—Guard, O Alfred, guard well an existence, on which the safety and happiness of a nation depend; and think when tho  
risquest

risquest that existence, that thou hazardest also the welfare of England!"

Alfred, won by this affection, promised he would keep close in his retreat, and commit no further hostilities till he received intelligence of the fortune of his friend, and Oddune departed well pleased with this assurance.

Many days passed before any intelligence arrived, and during that interval of leisure, Alfred instructed the young Ethelbert in all the virtues which should dignify and elevate the human race above the brutal. He delineated the beauty of goodness, he painted the deformity of vice, and his auditor, affected by the well drawn picture, wondered at the blindness and folly of man, who shuns and flies the former, and courts its hideous contrast with eagerness and assiduity.

"This depravity surprises thee," said Alfred, "but know that I have depicted

vice as she really is, not as she appears to her deluded votaries. Goading infamy, despair, and unavailing remorse, her constant attendants, she conceals from human view. Covered with the robe of pleasure dealing forth the blandishments of delight, she allures, and she is sought after; she promises bliss, and she attracts her unwary prey into the toils. Soon her borrowed beauty disappears, and she stands displayed in all her native hideousness. Her victim struggles to get free, but it is too late; her meshes have entangled him.—His soul is dispirited, his body enervated; and vainly thinking conquest unattainable, he considers submission as preferable to conflict. The enchantress presents the cup of intoxication: the oblivious poison glides into his veins. It infuses false images into his imagination; and what at first filled him with regret, and inspired him with disgust, is now followed and embraced. At length all delusions vanish, and sad reality

reality plunges him into the depths of never-ending shame and punishment!

How different, and how blest is the lot of the virtuous man!—He concentrers not all his enjoyments in himself, therefore are his enjoyments independent of any personal misfortune. He endures pain, he embraces toil, without considering them as evils, if he can render them conducive to the tranquillity of his fellow creatures. He feels the pure, the delightful conviction that he has acted well, and the benefits he has been able to confer are to him inexhaustible sources of heartfelt felicity.

He looks back on the past; he sees nothing to regret. He looks forward to the future, and a just hope leads him to the view of bliss unutterable and eternal!"

At these words Ethelbert, impelled by sudden admiration, exclaimed, " thou, O

King, thou art the character thou hast described!—Thou art the virtuous man, and it is the consciousness of that which exalts thee above all partial evils!"

"No, my dear Ethelbert," replied the King, "I am not this perfect character. Much remains to be done before I can attain it. Yet is it the ultimate object of my wishes; and should the moment come when my heart can assure me I deserve this ardency of praise, then shall not a false modesty induce me to disclaim it. But, Ethelbert, there are times when self intrudes;—when I lose the remembrance of my people's misfortunes, in the contemplation of my own. When I consider that though born to the most exalted rank amongst men, the inheritor of wealth, dignity, and power, I am forced to become a fugitive in my paternal dominions; to elude discovery with the vigilance of a nightly plunderer, and to depend even for existence on the benevolence of those whom

whom I have been accustomed to command.

True, I soon blush within myself for harbouring thoughts so unworthy, and quickly discard them for those of a more liberal nature. Yet then a dearer, and more tender interest occurs. I lament the restraint which I have imposed upon myself. I condemn the delicacy which led me to avoid the first blessing of my life, and I sigh, with anguish sigh, to recall the moments which can never return. In this account of my sensations thou mayest see the insufficiency of human wisdom. My description will teach thee that virtue itself, however alluring to those who have attained its prospect, requires many struggles, much mental toil and pain, before its summit can be reached. Yet it behoves us to make these struggles, and attempt to conquer this pain, for bright is the reward that attends good actions, and sweet the consciousness of rectitude, which

must at length possess us, however impeded for a time, by the obstacles which *self* continually obtrudes in our way."

" Still," replied Ethelbert, " still I see, and I feel, that thou art the first of mankind, and thy words cannot deprive me of an opinion which thy actions prove to be well founded. But pardon me, O royal Alfred, thou didst speak of a tender interest—hadst thou too a Birtha?"

He paused, and a blush of ingenuous confusion overspread his countenance.

" Banish thy embarrassment," said the King, taking his hand. " I see that affection, not an indiscreet curiosity impelled thy inquiry. But my young friend I cannot yet resolve it. When I can think of past scenes without regret; when I can cease to regard them with emotion, and learn to describe them with the indifference of a common narrator, then ~~shalt~~ thou

thou be satisfied. But now to speak, would recall all I wish to forget; would bring back soft and deluding images, and create a new struggle between virtue and injustice."

Ethelbert lamented he had spoken, and inwardly prayed for the restoration of peace to that bosom which deserved to possess it superior to all others.

Alfred turned the discourse, willing to stop the self accusation of his young friend. He spoke on a subject which forcibly attracted the attention of Ethelbert from the preceding. The pleasures of knowledge, the delights of literature, became his theme; and Ethelbert, to whom these pleasures were unknown, conceived them even greater than reality. He eagerly desired to cast off the fetters with which ignorance had bound his understanding; to experience the charms of mental refinement, and to add new assistance to his reasoning

faculties, by perusing the wisdom of ancient times.

Alfred, ever assiduous in the offices of benevolence, cultivated this generous ardour, and employed the passing hours in instructing him in the rudiments of education. His cares were repayed by the docility and intelligence of his pupil, who laboured without ceasing, to render himself worthy of so illustrious a preceptor.

Their studies were at length interrupted by a messenger from Earl Oddune. A letter from that noble informed the King, that he had thrown himself into the Castle of Kinwith, and was besieged by Hubba, the Dane. The conclusion of the letter expressed his concern for the captivity of Ethelswitha, (daughter to a distant kinsman of the King) who had been torn from a monastery where she had taken refuge, and was now a prisoner in the camp of Guthrum.

On

On reading this part, Alfred betrayed an agitation which Ethelbert had never before observed in his deportment. Again he read. Overpowered by the violence of his emotions, the guard of prudence deserted his lips, and he exclaimed—

“ Ethelswitha ! lovely and beloved Ethelswitha ! art thou a captive, and Alfred unable to deliver thee ? But why unable ?—No, I will myself pierce into the midst of thy oppressors.—I will rescue thee, or die !”

“ And *my* sword shall join thine !” cried Ethelbert, inflamed with the enthusiasm of friendship.

His words recalled Alfred to reflexion and prudence. He became calm by degrees, dismissed the messenger, and then retired for a moment to take counsel of his own thoughts.

After continuing some time alone, he sought Ethelbert. He approached him smiling and composed. "Thou hast seen," said he, "that the mind which seemed to thee best fortified with wisdom, has moments of weakness, when the sudden sallies of passion overpower reason, and banish circumspection. It is, however, the duty of him who would act with propriety, and steadiness, not to palliate his faults, but seek to correct them.—Be this the task of Alfred.

And now, my friend, I will tell thee of the resolution, which a few moments given to my better reason have enabled me to conceive. I considered the consequences that must ensue, were I to execute my rash declaration. My own destruction was inevitable; but that idea gave me no pain; on the contrary, I thought, with a kind of melancholy pleasure, that the same moment which presented me to the eyes of Ethelswitha a breathless corse, would also witness

witness the extent and strength of a love, which had been ever studiously concealed from her who inspired it.—Scarce had I indulged this idea, when England, bleeding England, seized my imagination. I saw my people deprived of every resource. I saw them given up to the insolence and the cruelty of merciless ravagers.—I saw virgin innocence become a prey to the wantonness of insult.—Fancy even poured the cries of the oppressed upon my ear. I shuddered. The guilt of deserting that important post which the Almighty has assigned me, appeared in all its deformity, and all its horror. Love yielded to the paternal duties of a monarch, and I determined to make no rash attempt, which failing, would plunge my subjects into irremediable misery, but wait the fair occasion when assault might be followed by victory; — that fair occasion which heaven will, I trust, present.

In this determination, my dear Ethelbert, I am now fixed beyond the power

of change. But I will no longer suffer thee to feel the suspense which I am sensible thou dost experience ; for the wounds of my soul are opened afresh, and since concealment can no longer answer the purpose for which I first designed it, I will gratify thy curiosity by a recital of those events, whose remembrance hath long deprived my soul of peace, however cheerful and serene my countenance.”

Ethelbert, under a supposition that this recital would renew his discomposure, disclaimed all curiosity, and attempted to dissuade him from his purpose.

Alfred penetrated his thoughts, and this disinterested forbearance touched him most sensibly.

“ No, friendly youth,” cried he, “ I will not be prevented. I have already told thee, and truly told thee, that concealment can no longer repress the acuteness

ness of my feelings. Why, therefore, should it deprive thee of a gratification, when to me it produces no benefit. Cease therefore to dissuade me, and speak not, but attend."

Ethelbert reverently bent his head. He maintained a respectful silence, and the King began :—

" While yet my Sire lived," said he, " I became acquainted with the charms of Ethelswitha. The first day that gave her to my sight, was on my return from my second voyage to Rome, whither I had gone by the command of Ethelwolf, and where the supreme pastor of the church had conferred on me the royal unction. My mother-in-law, Judith, had, since the first moment of her nuptials with my Sire, testified a partiality for me, little inferior to maternal affection. She came forth to welcome my return, and Ethelswitha, then in the first bloom of infancy, follow-  
ed

ed in her train. I was myself a boy, and I then considered her as no more than a lovely child, whom the affinity that bound us, and her various graces, called on me to caress and fondle. Notwithstanding the lavish affection which Ethelwolf bestowed upon me, the little delight he himself took in pursuits of literature prevented him from cultivating my mind. But my mother-in-law well supplied that defect. The recital of Saxon poems was to her a principal source of entertainment, and she generally courted my society when engaged in these amusements, with a view to inspire me with a passion for mental improvement. Her cares were answered. I applied myself with eagerness to the study of my own language, and by degrees, unsatisfied with that attainment, sought for more.

I soon obtained (for what will not inclination and industry accomplish?) a knowledge of the languages of heroism, genius,

genius, and politeness. I perused the writers of ancient Greece and Rome; I found true glory defined, and nearly in every page exemplified. My whole heart, all the faculties of my mind were changed. I lamented the barbarism of my countrymen, and determined, should heaven ever call me to the throne of my fathers, to dispel the mist of ignorance throughout my dominions. Ethelswitha, who resided with the Queen, became the partner of my studies, and the confidant of my projects. Each revolving year added new charms to her person, and new powers to her understanding. She regarded me with the tenderness of a sister, and I felt for her even more than the fondest brother could experience.

Thus passed our younger days; Halcyon days of innocence and tranquillity. The death of Ethelwolf transformed all our serenity into mourning. I obtained his dying benediction; received the last sounds

that quivered on his lips ; and my heart in grief for him, lost every foreign idea. But at length my affliction abated. I saw Ethelswitha again. Once more I took pleasure in my former pursuits, and in her society. This calm was of short continuance.

Ethelbald and Ethelbert, the two eldest sons of my Sire, succeeded him in a joint partition of the kingdom. The heart of Ethelbald was corrupted. The pride of birth, and the consciousness of power, had set him, in his own opinion, above the observation of those forms and duties which preserve peace and good order amongst mankind. He dared to entertain a licentious passion for the widow of his Sire, and, unawed by any consideration of religion or virtue, openly demanded her hand. Judith repulsed his suit with a just indignation. Her refusal, and the reproaches with which she loaded him, far from bringing him to a sense of his crime, inflamed

inflamed him with a tyrannical rage. He confined her in the palace; admitted no person to approach her but those in whom he confided, and menaced, that if she still continued averse to his wishes, her imprisonment should be perpetual.

The unhappy Judith wept without ceasing. I was a witness of her tears; and often did I wish for the strength of manhood to combat in her cause: but these wishes were vain and impotent. Heaven, however, sent her a deliverer in the person of Swithun, bishop of Winchester. He represented to Ethelbald, in soul-piercing language, the heinousness of the crime he was about to commit; and at length so strongly moved him, that he released Judith from her captivity, and permitted her to repair to the court of his brother Ethelbert, where she might hope for more security.

The young Ethelswitha was still her companion, and I also followed her by the

the permission of Ethelbald. His death, which soon after came to pass, secured her from further molestation. My second brother succeeded to the dominion of all England, and we passed in his court five years of peace and happiness.

He died.—Again we were exposed to the shafts of misfortune. His successor, Ethered, had never been a favourite to my Sire, or to Judith. He regarded the latter as an enemy, and gave her to understand, that her residence in the kingdom displeased him.

Judith, apprehensive of some new insult, determined to revisit France, and to take with her an infant daughter, the only fruit of her union with Ethelwolf. She hastened her departure, and Ethelswitha, who loved her with a filial fondness, accompanied her by the permission of her Sire.

Separation

Separation from persons so dear to me, was a stroke which required all my fortitude to support. At that moment I knew not which was most afflicting, the loss of Judith, or of Ethelswitha. I would have followed them, but the interest of England detained me ; and soon the increasing ravages of the Danes left me no leisure for unavailing regret.

At that time Oddune became the friend of my heart. The valorous deeds he achieved in an engagement, where I also was present, won my admiration, and on a nearer intimacy, his virtues attracted my esteem. A similarity of taste and inclination cemented our union still closer ; true friendship informed our breasts, and the vain distinctions of rank were forgotten ! In all moments of leisure we were companions in study : in times, when action called us forth, we fought side by side.

Mean

Meantime England became a scene of terror, tumult, and blood.—The north unceasingly poured forth new enemies. If a respite intervened, it was quickly shortened: in the moment of unguarded security, destruction, death, and desolation, overwhelmed us. If we fought in one part of the kingdom, if we conquered, sudden the flames of war illumined another. This scourge defeated the arts of policy, and rendered abortive the cares of prudence. The movements of the Danes resembled those meteors, which, when all nature is serene, shoot along the vaulted expanse; the celerity of whose course eludes observation, and mocks discernment.

After having made themselves masters of York, the Danes quitted the sea coast, and penetrated into Mercia. Ethered and I led an army against them: we defeated them at Nottingham, and obliged them to retreat into Northumberland. Satisfied with

with this success, Ethered imprudently disbanded his army, and we returned into Wessex, where I found Ethelswitha, who had endured some vicissitudes of fortune since her departure from England. She had shared the captivity of Judith, who, in her passage to France, had been seized and detained prisoner by Baldwin, Forester of Flanders. The attractions of my mother-in-law inspired him with the most ardent love. He sought and won her affections. The court of France used remonstrances and force to deliver her from his power—but equally without effect.

Wearied at length with efforts so unavailing, the Sire of Judith consented to her nuptials with the Forester; and Ethelswitha had no sooner witnessed the restored ease and security of her patroness, than she determined to return to her country, and her friends. This event was hastened by a misfortune which affected her most deeply. The stroke of death, terrible and

and unexpected, bereaved her of her friend—and bathed in tears, immersed in sorrow, and incapable of consolation, she revisited England.

The intelligence of her arrival gave me to experience a mingled joy and sorrow. I hastened to the palace of Morcar, her Sire. I sought Ethelswitha with an intent to share with her the sad consolation of mourning our mutual loss.

She appeared ; I advanced to salute her as became our ancient familiarity. But, great heaven ! how were all my senses confounded ; what unusual feelings agitated my frame, when she burst upon me all grace, beauty, and intelligence ! — I know not, what of astonishment, of awe, of admiration, assailed me ; but, though my heart was warm on my lips, I addressed her with an air of constraint, of distant and cool respect, which falsified my feelings.

Ethelswitha's

Ethelswitha's deportment appeared equally constrained with mine.—But her's was not the effect of confusion : the indifference of her heart was manifested by her countenance, and the grief which this conviction gave me, added to the embarrassment of my language and my actions.

At length I recovered myself sufficiently to speak of Judith, and the sensibility which she displayed on this subject rivetted my chains. Yet still the dignity which shone around her inspired me with awe. I presumed not to avow the admiration with which my soul was filled, and we parted with all the formality of new acquaintance.

This interview gave me too strong a conviction that I was no longer master of my heart, or of my thoughts : at all moments the idea of Ethelswitha would intrude, and so sweet was the intrusion, that I sought not to repress it.

I described

I described the beauties of this charming maid to Oddune, in such animated expressions, that he became inflamed with curiosity to see her. In an evil moment—yet, no—why should I regret having contributed to their happiness!—Fate itself had destined them for each other, and I ought not, consistent with virtue, honour, or fortitude, repine that the blessing was not reserved for me.

In the next visit which I made her, Oddune bore me company. I introduced him to her in such terms as his worth deserved, and my affection dictated.

Far different from the reception she had given me, was that with which she favoured the Earl of Devon. She spoke to him with ease, cheerfulness, and affability: appeared delighted with his conversation, and happy in his society.

When

When the moment of departure came, she desired him in a tone full of sweetness, to repeat his visit when his leisure would allow. She turned to me, blushed, and, with an air of visible reluctance and constraint, included me in the invitation.

My heart was torn, but I restrained its feelings from appearing. When we quitted her, Oddune spoke highly and warmly in her praise. Unjust as I was, I could not, as I ought, congratulate him on the share he seemed to hold in her esteem. True, I attempted to do so—but my congratulations were not uttered in the voice of friendship, but of coldness and indifference.

He perceived my emotions; generous friend! he perceived, and sought to relieve them. He led from the subject we were on to another, with so little an appearance of design, that it might have

deceived any discernment but that of a lover.

He spoke no longer of Ethelswitha, but I too well knew she could not be forgotten ; and the assumed indifference of his deportment served no other purpose than to turn my anger against myself, for having put him to so severe a test of friendship.

Yet still could I not avoid Ethelswitha. The day in which I saw her not seemed an age to my impatient love. Oddune ever accompanied me ; doubtless following the generous impulse of his soul, which would, if possible, banish from me every shadow of suspicion, for each moment did his pretended indifference to Ethelswitha appear to encrease.

In this state were our hearts, when fresh devastations of the Danes took from us all selfish considerations. They had quitted their retreat in Northumberland ; had laid

East

East Anglia waste with fire and sword, and cruelly murdered Edmund the governor of that country, who had surrendered himself to their power on a promise of security.

These barbarous acts called for a prompt revenge. Ethered hastened to muster his forces; but the Mercians, who had before betrayed a wish to shake off their dependence, refused to join him. He was forced, therefore, to trust solely to the faith and bravery of the men of Wessex, his hereditary subjects.

I attended him in this expedition, and Oddune was my companion. The urgency of the time would not afford me leisure to see Ethelswitha before my departure.

But conceiving it unjust to deny Oddune a gratification, which no necessity prevented him from possessing, I prevailed on him

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to bear her my parting remembrance, and his own.

Scarce had I forced him to go than I repented of my importunity. Thou seest youth, I conceal not from thee the littlenesses of sentiment which disturbed me. I blush *now* for having felt them, yet *still* at some moments will they intrude.

Oddune returned. By a generous artifice of friendship he would have persuaded me that Ethelswitha was overwhelmed with affliction for my departure, and apprehension for the dangers I was going to incur. He spoke of her tears. Alas! I knew they fell from another source. But I had no time for reflexion; our forces were in order for marching, and we hastened to seek the Danes.

We met, and put them to flight. They took refuge in their garrison, whither we advanced, determined to force them out if

if possible. An unexpected sally threw our forces, harrassed with long fatigue and toil, into confusion: our utmost efforts could not rally them, and we were obliged to raise the siege with considerable loss. But a battle, which we soon after fought, restored us to our former advantages, though the commencement of the action threatened us with every misfortune.

I had imprudently advanced, with one division of the army, into a situation disadvantageous to the movements of my forces.—The Danes perceived my error, and surrounded me.—I sent to Ethered for speedy assistance. My messenger found him at his devotions, and represented in urgent terms the dangers which menaced me and my companions. But his representation had no effect. Ethered, whose piety was superior to all other considerations, refused to advance till the holy duties in which he was then engaged were concluded.

At that moment was the sincerity of Oddune's friendship manifested in its true colours.—He was present in attendance on the King, and, starting from his kneeling posture, grasped his sword.

"Alfred," cried he, is the beloved of heaven? Shall we desert him?—My friends—ye, who are solicitous to gain the favour of Providence, follow me.—Ye shall best insure it by the preservation of Alfred!"

A small number obeyed his voice.—Heedless of the displeasure of the King; heedless of the danger he was going to encounter, he led this little band to my assistance. He pierced through the Danes with a force at once irresistible and astonishing, and gained the spot where my brave followers and I maintained an obstinate and bloody conflict.

Then

Then did his arm enact prodigies of valour, which nearly verified the deeds ascribed to the heroes of fabulous antiquity. Animated by his example—by what I owed to my country and myself, I was roused to new exertion; and we kept our enemies at bay till the forces of Ethered came up.

This insured us victory: we routed the enemy with great slaughter, prevented them from gaining their garrison by making ourselves masters of it, and obliged them to fly before us into a more distant country.

The King now hesitated whether to pursue them or return to Wessex, and the time which should have been given to action was spent in vain deliberation.

Mean time Oddune laboured under the displeasure of Ethered, and a consciousness that this misfortune had originated

from affection to me, pained my soul beyond the power of description. I thought too of his love for Ethelswitha: of his generous forbearance to declare it either to herself or me.—My heart smote me. I was the only obstacle to his being happy, for reason, observation, every thing combined to persuade me that his passion was returned.

Yet, spite of all these, my wavering heart still doubted. “Perhaps,” said I, “that which I have taken for coldness and indifference was assumed by modesty, to conceal too tender sensations.” This idea, though wild and improbable, was so flattering to my imagination, that I could not relinquish it.

I resolved to continue no longer in suspense. “I will learn,” said I, “from the lips of Ethelswitha, whether she loves my friend or —” I stopped.—Could I resolve to make Oddune miserable, by depriving

depriving him of the object of his hopes even if she *loved me* ?

I could form no determination ; yet I thought, were I once acquainted with the true state of her inclinations, I should become fixed.

Resolved to acquire this knowledge, and listening only to the impatience of passion, I quitted the camp without acquainting Oddune or the King, and made the best of my way to Wessex. I repaired to the palace of Morcar, and commanded the domestics not to announce my entrance, willing to see the effects of surprize on the heart of Ethelswitha.

Well acquainted with the apartments allotted for her residence, I approached them in violent agitation, and had already gained the door of an inner chamber, when her voice saluting my ears, prevented me from proceeding.

I heard my own name, and that of Od-dune, pronounced. I remained immovable : it was the moment to bring certainty to my tortured heart.

I listened. She seemed to speak to some confidant, whose accents reached me too.

"Beautiful Ethelswitha," cried the latter, "why wilt thou afflict thyself with conjectures such as these? Is it not more than probable that he loves thee? Do not his looks, his words, his actions, declare it most strongly?"

"Alas!" replied Ethelswitha, (in a tone which thrilled my soul) "alas! I have observed his looks, and I see in them no marks of tenderness. Nor ever have his words given me proof of that to which thou would'st persuade me. Oh, no!—he loves not Ethelswitha;—too sure he does not!—Once did I flatter myself—but

but that moment of delusion (it was *but a moment*) quickly fled. Has he not even seemed anxious to inspire me with a passion for his friend? Why else these unceasing encomiums—that eager solicitude to raise him in my esteem?—*Esteem*—O, yes I give him that; it is what his virtues claim, and I cannot withhold. But, alas! how different are my sensations when **I** think of *him* who considers me unworthy of his love. Elfrida—I blush for myself.—I blush that thou hast witnessed this weakness—I will die or conquer it.”

At these words she paused, and heavy sighs burst from her tortured bosom.

“ Still, still, I think thee wrong,” replied Elfrida. “ True, Oddune is—”

I could hear no more.—I rushed from the door, and from the palace. This was the certainty I had sought. Oh heaven, how its arrival overwhelmed me!

My fate was decided. "It is all over then," I cried, "and I have only to submit.—Yes, Oddune, Ethelswitha shall be thine! The unhappy Alfred shall no longer interrupt the progress of your loves!"

I returned to the camp as secretly as I had quitted it. My absence had furnished matter for surprize and conjecture. I preserved an inviolable silence on the cause even to Oddune, who, perceiving me oppressed with an unusual dejection, was led by the solicitude of friendship to develope its source. The eagerness of his inquiries could not stagger my resolution; for from him beyond all others it was necessary to conceal what had passed, if I meant his happiness, and that of Ethelswitha.

I well knew the generosity of his soul. His conduct to Ethelswitha had plainly manifested of what refinement of sentiment he was capable. And should I take advantage of that refinement?

I had

I had reason to believe, that, could I have committed such an offence to friendship, as to demand the hand of Ethelswitha, her Sire would have accorded it. But that spiritless, that half formed union, could not content my hopes, had I even been uninterested for Oddune. The dearer ties the nobler affections, were wanting, and without them most comfortless had been my state. By relinquishing Ethelswitha, to whom my pursuit would have given nothing but misery, I insured her happiness, and that of Oddune. Could I then think of obtaining a felicity at best imperfect for myself, at the price of rendering for ever wretched, two persons to my soul so justly dear?—No, my spirit revolted from the thought. Nor was the victory over self long deferred; and the consciousness that I was obeying the voice of virtue, inspired me at times with a pleasure more exquisite and more pure than what the utmost gratification of my love could have given me.

The

The conflict in my thoughts was scarcely finished, when the Danes, ever restless for war and plunder, committed new and horrid devastations, while their numbers were each day reinforced by fresh supplies.

We met the enemy; we gave them battle, and defeated them. But vain and transitory were our victories: when we imagined we had crushed this many-headed Hydra, it sprung up with redoubled vigour from the blow, and mocked our efforts. I will spare thy sensibility a recital of the dreadful scenes I have witnessed; where no variety comes in to diversify the tale, but all is black, terrible, and full of horror.—Suffice it to tell thee, that Ethered received, in one fatal engagement, a wound, which was pronounced beyond the reach of cure.

This was a moment that overwhelmed me with affliction and anxiety. Added to the natural sorrow I felt for the impending loss

loss of a brother, whom I loved most tenderly, the prospect of a throne (that prospect to others so delightful) was by me regarded with grief and terror.

How great, how awful was the charge with which I was about to be intrusted! Great and awful, even in times of serenity and peace.

To watch over a whole people with the unceasing solicitude of a tender parent; to be attentive to their wants, to supply their necessities. To search into, and destroy the subtle snares which fraud, oppression, and hypocrisy, weave for the innocent and helpless. To deter vice by punishment, and to encourage virtue by reward. To draw forth suffering merit from obscurity; to despoil titled wickedness of its usurped splendor; to temper the rigour of justice with the mildness of clemency; and ever  
to

to keep in remembrance that a monarch is to *rule*, not to *oppress*; to require reasonable obedience, not slavish submission; to know that in the affection, not the terrors of his subjects he is to seek for security: never to forget the claims which heaven and nature have given them upon him; and, in fine, at that awful hour when he is called to give an account of his charge at the Eternal Tribunal, to be able at that hour to say, “I have done justice—I have loved mercy—I have contributed to the happiness of millions!”

These were the common duties of a King; and these, the distresses and difficulties of my situation, gave me but small hope of the certainty of fulfilling. A cruel war raged through the kingdom I was to sway. My people, terror-struck, disheartened, taking no counsel but of their fears, those deceitful and faithless monitors!—Judge then, dear Ethelbert, if I had not reason

reason to lament, rather than to exult, at the acquisition of royalty.

While I contemplated the cares that awaited me, my soul was overwhelmed with anxiety; but as the human mind is ever most eager to indulge those thoughts, however wild or vain, which conduce to its relief from uneasy sensations, I encouraged even against probability a hope that Ethered might recover. I encouraged it to the moment of its final disappointment, for he expired in my arms, while I yet flattered myself he would live.

I mourned him with an unfeigned and pungent sorrow. He was the last of my brothers, and the most beloved. Some faults were mingled with his virtues; but who is perfect? He was brave; he was generous; and, where passion warped not his reason from its wonted bias, he was just.—Three brothers I had seen borne to the

the grave, but Ethered was the most lamented.—Alas, my brother!"

A tear glistened in the eye of Alfred. He paused for a moment, and then resumed.

"The common privilege of distress, that of indulging affliction unrestrained, was denied to me. I was forced from the yet warm, though lifeless body of Ethered, to answer the acclamations of the people, who hailed me as their King and their Protector."

Sacred and important titles!—I vowed to fulfil their duties to the utmost extent of that power with which heaven should endow me. But the duties of peace were not yet mine to practice; it was necessary, that I should first rid my kingdom of the scourge which threatened to lay it waste, before I attempted to frame any regulations for its internal policy.

Scarce

Scarce had I committed the corse of Ethered to the grave, when I was summoned to the field by the encreasing ravages of the Danes. I marched against them with a few troops, the suddenness of the occasion taken from me the power of levying a more numerous force.

Oddune, ever faithful and friendly, accompanied me. The onset was favourable to our hopes; we obliged the Danes to quit their station, and fly before us. But the heedlessness of youth conquered prudence. I rashly followed victory too far, and lost it by the eagerness of my pursuit. Superiority of numbers prevailed against us, and our enemies won the field.

They had, however, felt a loss so considerable, that fearing for the future, they stipulated to deliver up the greater part of the plunder they had gained, and depart the kingdom on condition of a secure retreat.

Though

Though the perfidy, which they had so often before displayed, gave me sufficient cause to doubt their performance of this agreement, yet the necessity of my situation would not suffer me to hesitate in my compliance ; and they were accordingly conducted to London, where I permitted them to remain till the arrival of spring, the time appointed for their departure from England.

I returned to my palace, and sought to provide for future security. But this was a work which required much time and leisure to accomplish ; yet I despaired not, and my efforts were unceasingly directed to this object.

During the short interval of quiet I enjoyed, the daughter of Judith and of Ethelwolf came to claim my protection. Flanders no longer afforded her a desirable refuge. I welcomed her with sincerity and joy. Deprived of Ethered by an untimely

untimely death—relinquishing Ethelswitha by my own choice, I had nothing to relieve the solitariness of my heart but the friendship of Oddune; and though in truth that in itself was a high consolation yet the tender and natural ties of affinity were softer, and more congenial to my soul. I found that Judith possessed all the accomplishments which the superior polish of the court she had been bred in could confer. Her manners were sweet and gentle, and her mind well formed; but an evil arose from her return which I had not foreseen.

Ethelswitha had been estranged from my eyes since the time I had determined to conquer her empire over my heart. I could no longer avoid her. Judith sought her society with eagerness, and I was compelled to see her oftener than was beneficial to my peace.

To be in her presence—to hear her enchanting voice, the vehicle of melody  
and

and refinement, was too seducing to bear with even an assumed indifference. My emotions were not to be concealed, and I determined to put myself beyond the reach of temptation to do wrong by making one great effort of fortitude and virtue.

One day I carried Oddune with me to the apartment of Ethelswitha. Earl Morcar and my sister were present. I addressed the former. “Behold,” said I, pointing to the Earl of Devon, “behold him who is alone worthy of thy alliance. By giving thy daughter to this spouse, thou wilt secure her happiness and thy own, and receive the thanks and acknowledgments of thy sovereign.”

I glanced my eye towards Ethelswitha as I spoke. I saw her apparently overwhelmed with the deepest confusion; but I knew it was the confusion of joy, and I hastily departed, fearful of hearing the gratitude

gratitude expressed which my words had caused ; words which tore my heart while I uttered them, and gratitude which could give me nought at that moment but the deepest anguish !

I had satisfied the claims of honour and of friendship : I had now to restore my own heart to the tranquillity it had lost. I owed this to the welfare of my people ; their interest required that I should no longer abandon myself to the influence of fruitless sorrow and unavailing regret. Millions depended on me for happiness or misery, and should I think a moment of partial evil ? I blushed at my own weakness ; I determined to subdue it, and in the attempt found half the victory.

What do I say ?—Dear Ethelbert I only *thought* I had found it. Thou wert a witness of my reviving weakness. The flame lay dormant, but it was not extinguished. Again must I seek for conquest over

over my own sensations, and at length, perhaps, success may crown my efforts.

I soon saw Oddune. I had expected to find him all joy and rapture, but I perceived no other expression in his countenance than that of calm indifference. I assumed a voice of cheerful composure, and felicitated him on his approaching happiness. "I desire not the love of women," said he, in a tone more abrupt and rough than was natural to him, "the toils of the camp are better suited to Oddune than the delights of the palace, and warlike exercises than domestic endearments."

"Thou art indifferent then to Ethelswitha!" cried I, with involuntary transport. "We are mutually indifferent," he replied, "and we have mutually agreed to separate our fates."

"Can this be possible?" I exclaimed.

"O, royal Alfred," resumed Oddune,

"no

"no longer doubt.—Cast away all vain surmises:—I love not Ethelswitha—but thou"—he paused.—“ My master—my friend, resolve to be happy, and thou art so!"

At these words the truth flashed at once upon me. I saw the generous design of Oddune, and my grateful heart determined to emulate his in nobleness. I assumed a look of the utmost surprize; ridiculed him on the depth of his penetration, and attempted to persuade him that I was free from that passion he suspected. He affected to believe me, but still insisting on his own indifference gave me conviction that his credulity was feigned. In this state, eager to maintain false appearances, we both continued without either having the power of deception. I applied myself more assiduously than ever to affairs of state; Oddune assisted me with his counsels, and soon the name of Ethelswitha ceased to pass our lips.

Mean time the Danes, whom I had imagined quiet in the winter quarters I had allotted them, with their usual negligence of all engagements, however sacred, broke that which they had formed with me, and laid waste the country surrounding London.

Burrhed, who had married my sister, and who governed Mercia under the title of King, engaged them to remove from his territories by presenting them with large sums of money, and entertained the vain hope of having satisfied their avidity. They removed accordingly, but to a place which they had already reduced to desolation. Meeting, therefore, nothing there to gratify their propensity to rapine, they returned to Mercia, and again overwhelmed it with new calamities.

Burrhed, hopeless to withstand them, listened to his fears, and timorously abandoning the post committed to his charge, quitted

quitted his country, and fled to Rome, where he retired to a cloyster.

This step, the common refuge of weak and superstitious minds, has been too often the resource of abject royalty. It is easier to *supplicate* the favour of heaven, than to merit it by acting well ; but vain are the supplications of idleness, and useless that piety which acts not for others as for itself.

' Scarce had I taken arms to assist the Mercians, when Guthrum, Oscitel, and Amund, arrived with a new swarm of invaders. Thou art acquainted with what has since passed ; thou knowest what reverses of fortune have attended me, and that after fighting eight battles in the space of one year, I have been at length reduced to quit my throne, to cast away my dignity, and to descend from power and a crown to servitude and obscurity. Before my concealment I provided, as I then thought,

L 2 . . . . for

for the security of my sister and Ethels-witha. But thy barbarous countrymen invade the retreats of peace, innocence, and holiness, nothing is sacred from their depredations. Perhaps the moment of retribution is at hand.—O, may it arrive!— Yet, even at that moment, be thou my soul collected, compassionate, and humane; remember that thy enemies are men, and that victory and cruelty should never be united.”

Alfred ceased, and Ethelbert perceiving he had ended his relation, thought it necessary to speak, though harrassed at that moment by feelings of deep distress and perplexity; yet, concealing them to the best of his power, he addressed the King. “O, royal instructor,” he cried, “enamoured of thy virtues—touched as I am by thy sufferings, I cannot—no, never can I express all that my heart is filled with towards thee! Yet, though I admire, I esteem, I applaud thee, I feel, alas!

alas! I feel too forcibly that to imitate thy conduct would be to me impossible!"

At these words an air of deep dejection clouded his countenance : he sighed, and finding his emotions too strong for longer restraint, retired from the presence of the King.

Alfred wondered for a moment at the melancholy of his deportment, and the abruptness of his departure; but, after musing for some time, imagined he had developed the cause, and hastened to seek him out, in order to discover whether his conjectures were justly founded.

Ethelbert blushed on seeing him approach, and attempted to assume an aspect of composure. The King advanced, and took his hand. "Why didst thou fly me?" said he, in a tone of kindness. "What occasioned the sudden dejection

that seized thee? and why wert thou averse to declare thy feelings to thy true friend?

“O, condescending Prince!” replied Ethelbert, much affected, “how unworthy am I of this goodness. Yet will I once more aspire to merit it by revealing my sentiments without disguise. Yes, from this moment, I spurn all mean concealment! I will tell thee what I have thought that Ethelswitha loves thee, and thee alone. And that Birtha and Ethelswitha are the same.”

“Be composed, good youth,” replied Alfred, “let not so vain a thought disturb thee. Too well I know that Ethelswitha loves only Oddune; and since Birtha gave thee hopes of her favour, she cannot be Ethelswitha. But say, dear Ethelbert, what cause hast thou for thinking thus?”

“What

"What cause?" exclaimed the youth, "alas! most powerful cause! No person can answer the description thou gavest of the daughter of Morcar, but Birtha.—There are not two so beautiful—add too, that her captivity agrees with that of Ethelswitha; and already have I told thee, that the lips of Birtha were lavish in thy praise. Canst thou then entertain a doubt that thou art loved, most fondly loved?"

These reasons weighed but lightly with Alfred. To tell him that Birtha was lavish in his praise, was to him a full conviction that she was not the mistress of his heart; for so firmly was he persuaded that Oddune alone possessed her affections, that her own avowal to the contrary would scarcely have proved sufficient to make him relinquish the opinion. He sought to comfort the son of Harold by giving him the same thoughts, and that youth, full of gratitude for these condescending cares, affected to find them probable, that his

L 4                    benefactor's

benefactor's wishes for his composure might not remain unanswered.

In this state were there feelings when the messenger of Oddune arrived. His looks promised favourable tidings, nor did the letter he carried contradict them. It contained these words—

“ Health and joyful greeting to the princely Alfred. Heaven has smiled upon the endeavours of his faithful subjects. Kinwith is no longer besieged.—Oddune possesses the standard of the raven.—Hubba has fallen beneath his arm; and the Danes, overwhelmed with consternation, have abandoned Devonshire. The honoured friend of the royal Alfred now awaits his further commands.”

“ My hopes were not then fallacious,” cried Alfred, on finishing the perusal of this letter. He knelt, and raised his hands to heaven.

“ Almighty

"Almighty Being," he exclaimed, "If it be thy will to bestow good fortune on me, let not the lessons of adversity be forgotten in the fullness of prosperity. Still let me, in providing for the future, recollect the past. And should vain glory possess my spirit, should pride acquire dominion in my heart, then let me recall the cottage of Dunwolf, and regain humility."

He arose; commanded the messenger to wait some hours, and during that time retired and revolved the measures proper for his future conduct.

When deliberation was concluded, and he had determined how to act, the messenger was conducted to his presence, and received further instructions for the Earl of Devon. This done, he took the son of Harold aside. "My dear Ethelbert," said he, "I am going to quit thee for some

days, and to thy care will I intrust our few yet faithful followers till my return.

" And why, O royal Alfred," inquired the youth, in a tone of concern, " why cannot we attend thee?"

" I will explain the cause," replied Alfred, " for I confide in thy discretion—  
" I have directed Oddune," he continued, " to dispatch secret emissaries amongst my people in order to sound their sentiments, and try whether they prefer a brave resistance to supine submission. Those who are found faithful, resolute, and valiant, they are to inform that their King yet lives, and lives only to deliver them, or perish in the attempt. If, as my hopes predict, this intimation arouses them to the accomplishment of generous thoughts, the emissaries of Oddune are to invite them to join his arms. And I have directed him to meet me with what forces he can assemble at the forest of Selwood on an appointed

appointed day. But, my dear Ethelbert, the numbers of the danes are far superior to what we can muster. Prudence, vigilance, and foresight are therefore necessary to procure us conquest. We must discover the state of the Danish army. Report informs us of its strength; but to learn in what consists its weakness, (to us a most important knowledge) personal experience can only teach. Behold in me, dear Ethelbert, the observer. Yes, I have determined to enter the camp of the Danes, and to witness, with my own eyes, its weakness and its strength.

"What, thou—thou enter the Danish camp?" cried Ethelbert, with a voice, and look of surprize. "O, royal Alfred," he added, in an earnest tone, "go not—risque not thy life, and the safety of thy people. Let some meaner, some less valued person, execute the office thou would'st impose upon thyself."

“No, Ethelbert,” replied the King, I have fabricated the design, and *I* am most interested to execute it with prudence and circumspection. And grant that discovery were to be apprehended, should I trust to the vigilance and discretion of another what I believed myself incapable of accomplishing?—*I* who have formed the plan—*I* who am in the highest degree concerned in its success.—A success which can only affect what my hopes and wishes point to; that the people of England should be free as their own thoughts \*! My friend, it is true that caution is useful, and therefore have I resolved to enter the Danish camp. But caution may degenerate into cowardice and pusillanimity. Those who are influenced by it in this degree lose advantage by apprehending danger. Like the miser, who sits brooding over his heaps of ill-gotten wealth, and hears that the plunderer is advancing

\* This sentiment was really inserted in the will of Alfred.

to bereave him of all he holds most valuable. He starts; he trembles; he freezes through every vein: yet the sordidness of his spirit makes him neglect the means which are necessary for the preservation of what he considers as so dear. He dares not quit his station, he dares not claim assistance, fearful he must expend a small part of that wealth of which the whole is in danger the most imminent.

Thus dreading evil, and equally dreading to guard against its approach, he falls a ready prey to the avidity of the spoiler, and in an instant loses the accumulation of a life. I will not resemble him dear Ethelbert. The liberty of England is *my* treasure. Dear and sacred is it to my soul. But while I watch over it with vigilance, I will not neglect to preserve it by exertion. Behold me then resolved, but fear not for my safety. I will appear amongst my enemies, and they shall not know me. I will assume a disguise, which shall

shall elude the quick perception of discernment, and lull suspicion into confidence."

"And how," cried Ethelbert, with an expression of surprize, "how, O King, canst thou effect these purposes?"

"Know," replied Alfred, "that I have cultivated a taste for music in all those moments which I could spare from nobler studies. I have acquired some skill on the harp, and have formed to its measures many songs, which treat of the soft as well as of the fiercer passions. With this instrument in my hand, and clothed in the habit of a minstrel, I will appear among the Danes as a person willing to gain the reward of his abilities, and I trust in the favour of a benign and over-ruling providence to crown my enterprize with security and success."

"May thy trust be answered!" cried Ethelbert, with energy, "may thy hopes be

be accomplished!—and sure, if virtue is the care of heaven, they cannot fail to be so."

"I owe thee thanks good youth," replied the King, "both for thy wishes, and thy praise. But till I better merit it, be not too lavish of the latter—until I mark in prosperity that I have not forgotten the lessons of ill fortune."

In discourses such as these they passed the remainder of the day, which was then near its close.

Early the ensuing morn Alfred quitted the posture of repose, and prepared for action, by dispatching some of his followers in quest of those things which were necessary for the support of that character he was going to assume.

While these persons were absent, he observed that Ethelbert appeared to labour under

under an unusual agitation ; nor was the cause long undiscovered by his discernment.

“ Still Ethelbert,” said he, with a smile of kindness, “ still dost thou think that Birthā is Ethelswitha, and that Alfred is about to be blest with her sight and happy in her affection. Say, good youth, have I not conjectured well?—Are not these thy sentiments?—Speak, tell me all, and expect sympathizing pity, but do not fear reproof.”

“ O, first of men,” cried Ethelbert, “ well hast thou guessed my thoughts. They are weak, they are low, they are unworthy of thee, and of myself. Not yet, nor ever can I attain that greatness of mind—which shines so visibly in thee.

I see my faults; I see them in the strongest light, but to my eternal confusion I cannot conquer them. I wish  
thy

thy good fortune, thy felicity. But that the love of Birtha should constitute part of that felicity, gives me nothing but the deepest pangs of affliction and despair."

"Would I could persuade thee youth," replied Alfred, "that from me thou hast nought to fear; for such, in truth, is my opinion. However a short time will put an end to all suspense; and should things come to pass, as *thou* fearest, but *I* think they will not, be assured that Oddune, not Alfred must be the obstacle to thy happiness."

Ethelbert still doubted: for though the hopes of love are generally more strong than its apprehensions, *his* apprehensions were stronger than his hopes.

Birtha had never, in explicit terms, declared she loved him. How then could he be assured of her favour?—True, she had listened to him without displeasure, she

she had spoken to him with complacence; but this might have been no more than the result of the affability and sweetness natural to her disposition. With these conjectures did he continue to torment himself, notwithstanding the arguments and soothings of Alfred, till the messengers returned with the materials of disguise. Alfred seized them eagerly, and retired with Ethelbert.

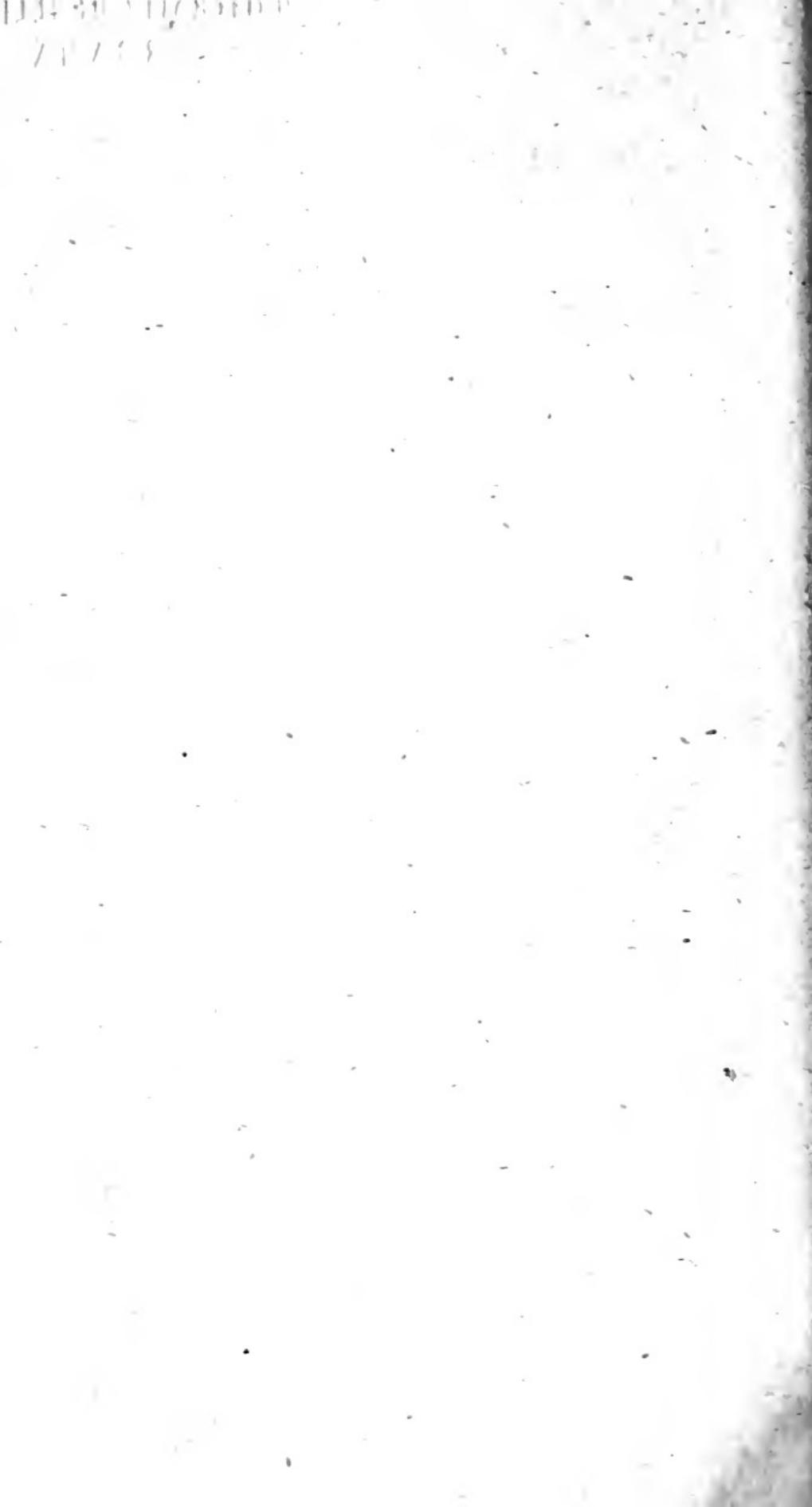
He eyed these habiliments with transport. "Lowly weeds," exclaimed he, "if ye conduce to the deliverance of England ever with careful veneration shall Alfred preserve ye."

He now imparted to Ethelbert the instructions he would have observed; then putting on the minstrel's habit, and concealing a well-tried sword beneath his mantle, he took the harp in his hand, embraced Ethelbert, and, after commanding

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ing his followers, in the name of Earl Oddune, to obey this youth, and attend to his directions, he sallied forth from the Isle of Nobles, and commenced his journey.

END OF VOL. I.



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